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HINT, HINT...

22 CAN'T-MISS  
HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS FOR  
OUTDOORSMEN  
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THE SOUL OF THE TOTAL OUTDOORSMAN  
DECEMBER 2015–JANUARY 2016

WATERFOWL  
GOOSE TRICKS &  
DREAM DUCKS

FISHING  
HOOK STEELHEAD IN  
THE BITTER COLD

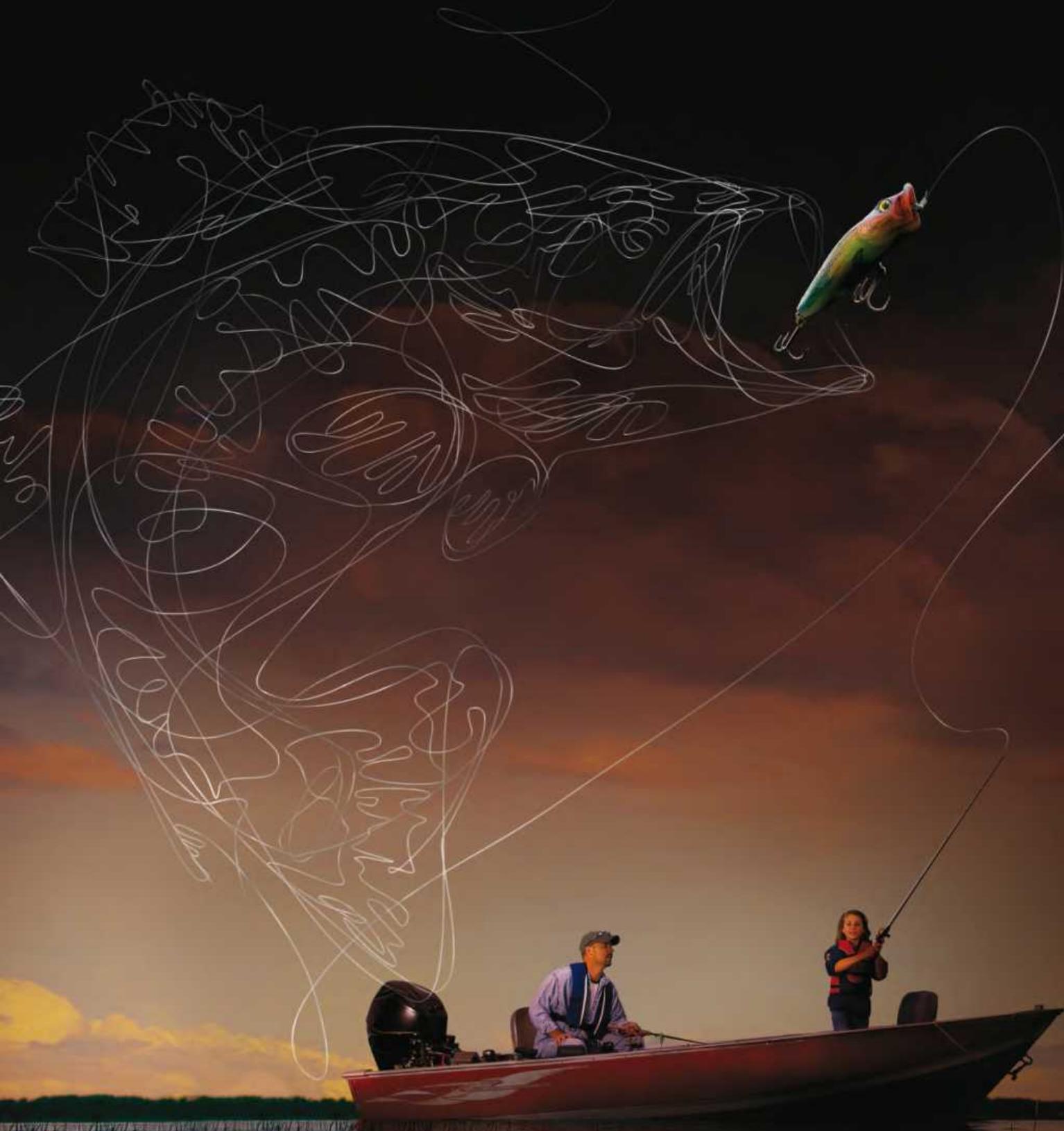
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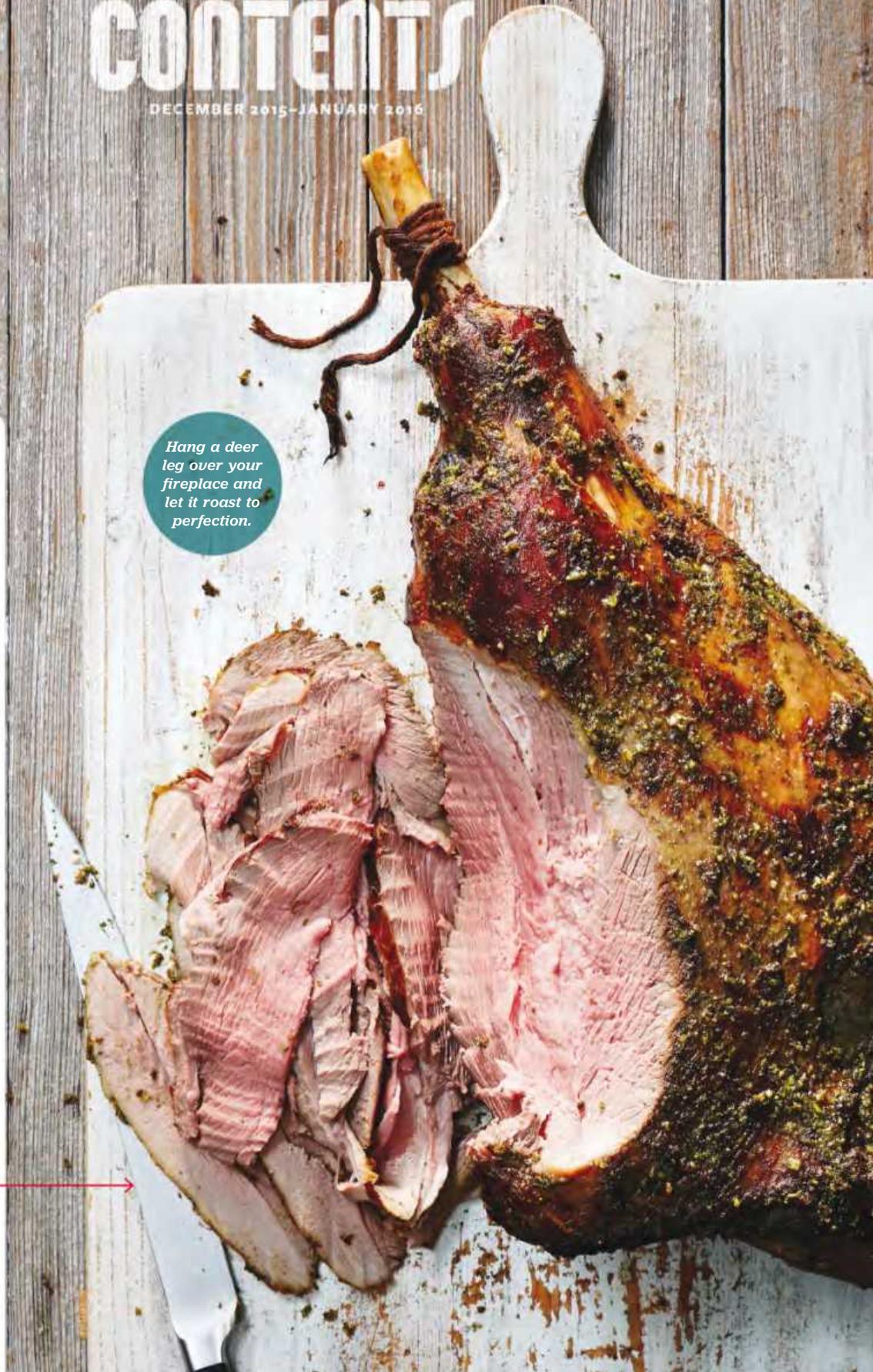
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## FROM THE EDITOR

F&S

# A Place of Honor

A REAL TROPHY IS ABOUT THE ANIMAL, NOT THE HUNTER

Y

EARS AGO I KILLED a black bear on a spot-and-stalk hunt in the North Country. He was a huge old boar. His head was like a big pumpkin, and his pelt was thick and beautiful. It was a spectacular animal and a terrific adventure.

I've heard some hunters say they don't care for bear meat, but I like it. Two years before this hunt I had killed a young boar at my camp that tasted better than beef. Personally, I feel that if I don't enjoy eating bear, then I shouldn't hunt them. So I butchered him and froze the quarters and loins solid before stuffing them in coolers and duffels. My baggage fees for the flight home nearly maxed out my credit card.

I smoked one of his hams at a family reunion. I served braised roasts at dinner parties. For over a year we ate bear enchiladas, bear chili, bear ragout. Truth be told, the flavor was excellent—rich and complex—but the meat was tough and required careful cooking and, on occasion, determined chewing. But I savored every bite because each meal brought me back to the hunt.

Here's the part I regret.

I took the hide to a taxidermist for a rug that I imagined would sit in my office or hang on the wall of a cabin for the rest of my days. But the cost of making a rug out of such a big bear stunned me. I struggled to justify spending that large sum when there were more important things that my family needed. To be completely honest, I simply didn't have the money.

I wouldn't call myself a trophy hunter. I'm a meat hunter, and I wouldn't dream of disrespecting that bear by not eating it. But did I disrespect it by abandoning the hide with the taxidermist? Didn't I owe the bear a place of honor in my home? The instinct to keep a trophy, to honor the animal, is a primal urge, running from our oldest ancestors through native hunters right up to the guy who nails a whitetail rack above the barn door. A trophy isn't some kind of ego-stroking badge. Along with meals, photos, and stories, it's just another way—an ancient and honorable way—to celebrate the spirit of a wild animal and the beautiful place in which it lived.

Anthony Licata, Editor-in-Chief  
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## CONTRIBUTORS



**Thomas McIntyre** has long written for F&S about how he hunts—but in reflecting on why he pursues prize game (“Fierce Objects of Desire,” p. 88) he dove further into cerebral territory than usual. “I wanted to clarify for myself, as much as the reader, why trophy hunting is valid,” he says. “It was rewarding to make a rational argument based on my experiences.”



For “Letting Go” (p. 68), illustrator **Tim McDonagh** hoped to capture the emotional significance of landing a trophy fish. “The author had looked for this striper his whole life, so I wanted to show it in this legendary way,” says McDonagh, whose work has appeared in GQ and Wired. “But the story has a sensitive side that was important to convey, too.”

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# HIDDEN GEMS

Not every trophy is a wall-hanger. Throughout this issue, our editors and writers share the stories of their favorite, and most personal, outdoor treasures. And we want to hear yours, too\*

*Trophy photographs by Dan Saelinger*



## My Trophy

### A SQUIRREL TALE

If you pull a certain essay collection from the shelf in my living room, an uncharacteristically bulky bookmark all but forces you to open to a story about squirrel hunting. This doesn't happen by accident. I find a new bookmark for every book I read, and once I finish the last page it stays inside that book for good. For this hardback, I never second-guessed what the bookmark would be: a preserved squirrel tail.

The gray squirrel that once flicked that tail was the first animal I ever killed. My colleague Mike Toth invited me to hunt with him on a WMA near his New Jersey home, and 10 minutes in I spied a squirrel at the base of a tree

and fired. We shot one more that day, and Toth generously sent me home with all of the meat—as well as the tail of the first critter.

It was a wildly fun day, but once it ended I found myself searching for ways to prolong the experience. Cooking and savoring my first wild-game meal (squirrel potpie) was one way to do that. Deboning and preserving the tail was another. My wife found it gross that I used an animal part as a bookmark, but it seemed perfectly natural to me. And now, whenever I open that book to a story about squirrel hunting in Kentucky, the tail takes me back to my own story about squirrel hunting in New Jersey. —Colin Kearns

\*Visit [fieldandstream.com/MyTrophy](http://fieldandstream.com/MyTrophy) to share your trophy story.



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## BLACK HOLE

\* Hank Garvey, an award-winning decoy carver and avid water-fowler, was hunting black ducks on the Merrimack River off Plum Island, a Massachusetts barrier island, when the rising tide forced him to reposition his layout boat and spread. “One of the challenges of hunting the salt marsh is that the tide fluctuates 10 feet over the course of six hours,” says Garvey. “So you can’t stay in one spot.”

It was a bitter-cold January nor’easter, with the snow blowing sideways, but Dorie, his 9-year-old black Lab, was eager to hunt even with the brackish water

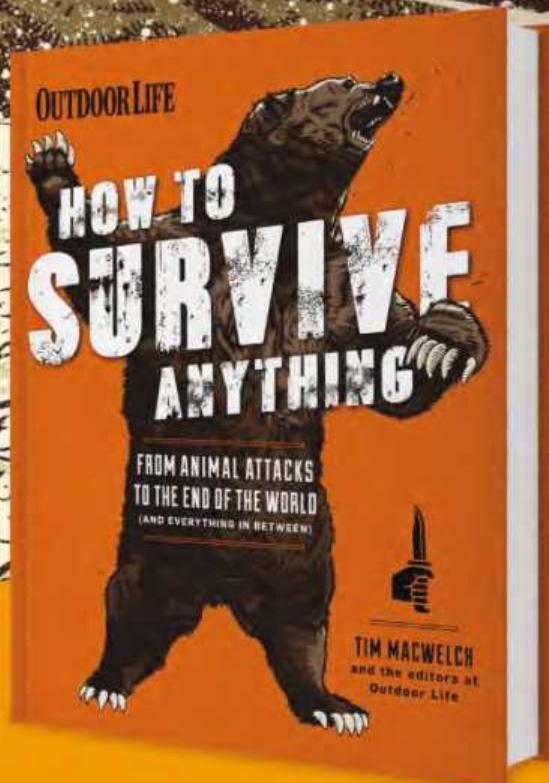
freezing up. “People ask why I want to go out in those harsh conditions. For me, it’s a test. There’s a thrill to withstanding it, and the birds work really well to the decoys.”

Garvey hunts over his own oil-painted white-cedar decoys carved in various positions, like the headless feeding decoy above. “Black ducks are wary. I love working them in close, especially when it’s windy. Part of being a good sportsman is having them finish all the way in so you can make an ethical shot.” He took his one-bird limit that day.

—DONNA L. NG

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# CHEERS & JEERS

THE SHOW ME (MORE QUAIL) STATE, A FAMILY REUNION, AND A DOG NOSE BEST



## FLIPPING FOR BIRDS

**Wow.** "The First Family of Quail" (Oct. 2015) takes me back to my first hunts with my dad and ol' Jack, his English setter. If there were still birds around, I wouldn't be a deer hunter.

Michael Powell,  
via Facebook

## YES SIRREE, BOB

I'm glad the White family is using land management to revive wild quail in Missouri ("The First Family of Quail"). I hunted public land all over the state last year, and my dog and I had one point. One. I loved hearing about folks getting two coveys an hour.

Brad Fitzgerald, via Facebook

Awesome work. We need more families like the Whites.

Tyler Lueck, via Facebook

## BABY (BACK) ON BOARD

A year ago, I renewed my subscription to F&S after decades of having not read it. I've been miss-

ing out. I'm a baby boomer, and I first discovered the magazine when I was a boy because my dad, who was the greatest outdoorsman ever, as far as I'm concerned, subscribed. In fact, I still deer and pig hunt with his old Model 98 8mm Mauser, and like him, I believe I'm a better sportsman and a better American because of FIELD & STREAM.

Herod Lowery, Orcutt, Calif.

## OPTICAL DISILLUSION

Richard Mann evaluated thousand-dollar riflescopes ("Go-Long Glass," Field Test); however, there are also many excellent, moderately priced tactical

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LOADED QUESTION

Q **What's the best all-around big-game rifle?**

A Marlin 1895 in .45/70 can beat most bolt actions and won't damage meat (or your shoulder) at 50 yards. —Shane Brown

A Springfield 1903 sporterized in .30/06 will take down a whitetail in Wisconsin, a leopard on safari, and everything in between. —Lewis Shallow

A Winchester Model 70 Featherweight in .308 is like an extension of your hand. Plus, it has a proven pedigree. —Jack Group

Answer next month's Loaded Question at [Facebook.com/FieldandStream](https://Facebook.com/FieldandStream). We'll share the best responses here.

scopes on the market. Other readers and I would be better served by reviews of less costly scopes that an average hunter or shooter can afford. Let's get back to the real world, F&S.

Mike Rowe,  
Garden Grove, Calif.

*The author was determining which long-range scope to use in Africa, not which to help pick off the neighborhood spike. Would you rely on anything but the best if a Cape buffalo were staring you down?*

—THE EDITORS

**SAY IT, DON'T SPRAY IT**

I found "The Sniff Test" (Whitetails) very informative. More than anything, it reinforced what most seasoned

hunters already know—which is that no-scent sprays don't work. In the past, I spent a fortune on them only to go home disappointed after a nice buck sniffed me out. Now I'm convinced my money is better spent on an extra treestand to have as an alternative if the wind shifts.

Matt Griffin, Linden, Tenn.

I always knew you couldn't hide human scent from whitetails, but Scott Bestul's column left me wondering whether no-scent sprays can help dissipate a hunter's smell faster on walk-ins, or if they can confuse deer as to when a human passed through. Have there been studies on this?

Ron Jones, Wadsworth, Ohio

*The drug-sniffing dog had no problem picking up the hunter's path regardless of which spray he slathered on, but if you need further proof, we invite you to donate your deer season to science and conduct your own experiments.* —THE EDITORS

**GIVE HIM A MERIT BADGE**

T. Edward Nickens perfectly described the hours of sweat and blood hardcore deer hunters such as myself put into scouting months before the season begins ("Scout's Honor," The Total Outdoorsman). I knew if any outdoor magazine would successfully put my scouting obsession into words, it would be F&S.

Brandon Napier,  
Rensselaer, Ind.

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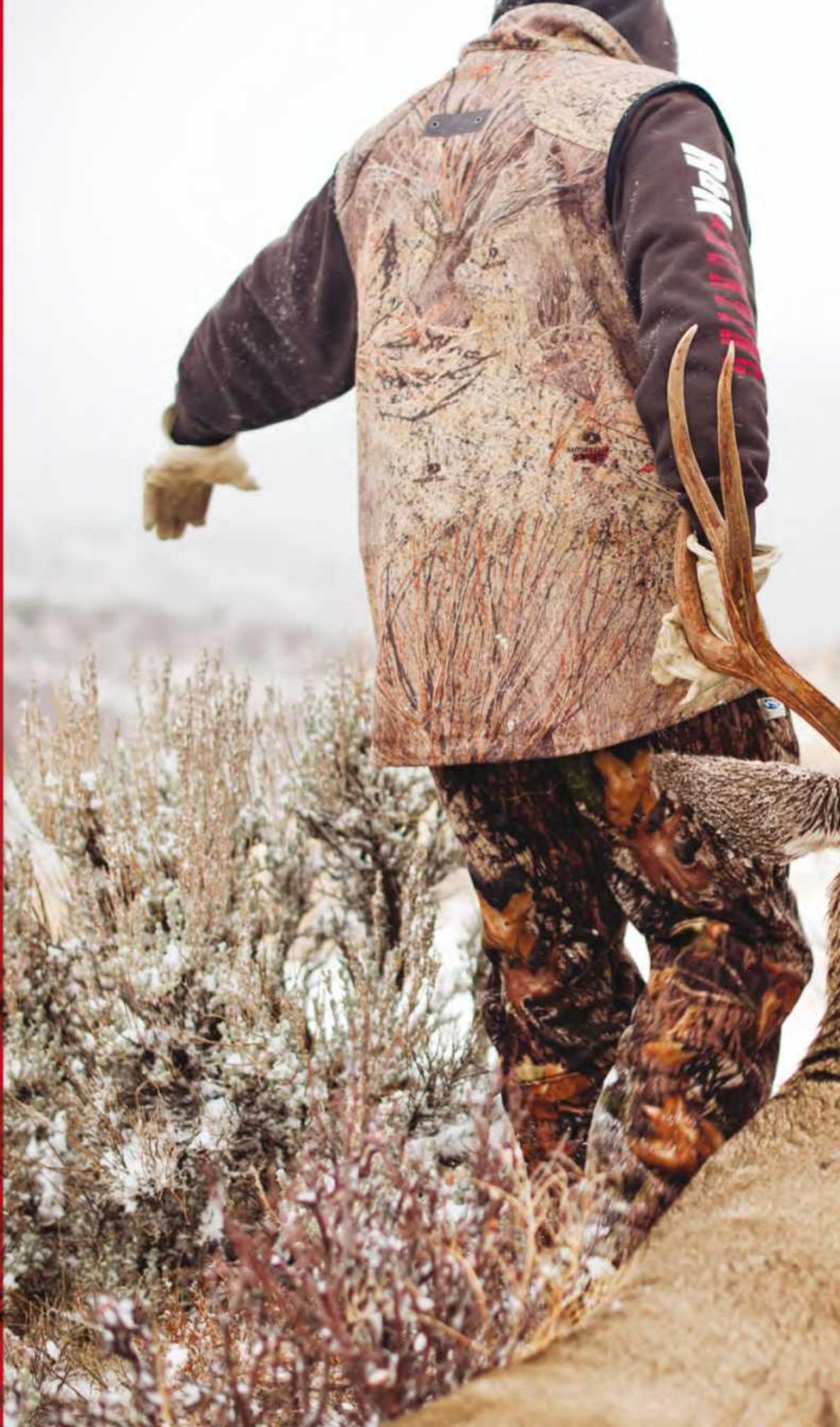
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## ONE MORE HUNT

Stalking winter mule deer with a muzzleloader is a thrilling way to end your deer season

By David Draper

# CAMPFIRE





**Haul Out** •

A pair of hunters drag a late-season Utah muley back to hunting camp.



**Blizzard Buck** •  
A tall 4x4 mule deer trudges through deep snow.



THE SUN IS a hint below the horizon, but already the wind is howling. In December on the plains, the wind always blows, but rarely at this clip this early in the morning. And by the looks of the dark clouds pushing in from the West, a snowstorm is coming. I've got an hour, maybe two, to punch my tag before the blizzard makes conditions too tough.

Here in Nebraska, muzzleloader season lasts all of December, and it's my favorite time to stalk big mule deer. I'll get out every day I can until my buffalo bullet intersects with a good buck. The first few days of the season see some pressure, but after that I have the breaks above the river all to myself.

I'm hunting two particular bucks this year—one is a wide 4-pointer with distinctive brown tines, and the other has a tall and deep rack. Either would make a fine trophy. I last saw them the day before rifle season, and now, two weeks into December, they're still absent. I've been on a few smaller bucks, but 4x4 and Tall Boy are no-shows. I start to wonder if they're already in other hunters' freezers. Still, I'm hopeful. I keep hunting.

#### VAST AND BLAST

Spot-and-stalk hunting is an even bigger challenge in this wide open country. Almost always, the deer spot you before you see them. So I focus on figuring out their patterns until I can put together the puzzle of knowing where they'll be and when. Then it's a matter of getting within 100 yards.

A scoped in-line muzzleloader would

stretch that distance to 150 yards, or even 200. Although Nebraska allows the modern guns, I still prefer to carry a traditional blackpowder rifle. With the crowds gone, I don't feel disadvantaged, but the Hawken's limited range, coupled with open sights (and my aging eyes), makes tagging December's deer more challenging and rewarding.

Each day I've been out, the hunting has improved now that the deer are back on the feed. They filter out of the canyons to the few winter wheatfields that line the edge of the tableland. Typically, the muleys retreat to their hides well before light and return just as the shortest days of the year come to an early end. A winter storm can alter that pattern, driving the deer to forage longer, even during the middle of the day.

Over the last two weeks, I've developed a routine, hiking a wide arc along the high ground south of the only ag field for miles. This gives me a good vantage point to glass the green wheat from downwind before circling to the deep and narrow canyon where the deer have been staging.

Since I'm on the move for most of the

hunt, I forgo a spotting scope. Instead, a pair of light 12x42 binoculars hang from my lanyard, providing enough zoom to pick antlers from the buckbrush. I also ditch a heavy pack and instead fill my vest pockets with just the essentials: a knife, matches, a few spare bullets, and a powder flask. The powder measure and capper are knotted to a shoelace around my neck. A single nod to modern technology—a small rangefinder—hangs like a quick-draw holster at my hip. The open landscape plays tricks on the eye, making big-bodied bucks look closer. More than once I've sent a heavy-lead buffalo bullet into the frozen dirt well short of its target.

#### STOP COLD

The wheatfields are already empty at dawn, but I catch sight of a lone doe as she drops off the horizon into a deep canyon where I've found deer before. I hustle over there and am sweating by the time I reach the ridgeline, but the shivers start as soon I drop down and start my belly-crawl to the edge. The first wet snowflakes paste against my face. Visibility is dropping fast.

I slide a cap onto the nipple and check the sights. Two weeks of hunting and this is the first time I've primed the Hawken. As I crawl those last few yards, snow pushes up my shirt, further tightening the predatory coil inside me. My eyes adjust their focus through the flakes and I spot 4x4 first, standing across the narrow canyon. He looks my way, then glances behind him as Tall Boy comes down the trail. I'm relieved they're alive, as if seeing two old friends again. I swallow to push the heart in my throat down and rise to my elbows. The wind buffets me as I aim—first at 4x4, then at Tall Boy. Each buck disappears behind the iron front sight. I don't need my rangefinder to know the shot is too long.

Just below me I hear the doe blow up with a snort, catching the attention of the bucks. They both follow her over the fence and onto the neighboring ranch. If I had a modern muzzleloader, I'd be punching my tag, but I'm not disappointed. Now I know both of the big bucks are out here. And I've still got two more weeks.

#### GEAR TIP



#### LIGHTEN UP

As a nod to tradition, I used to wear wool on my winter mule deer hunts for many years but tired of the extra weight, especially when it got soaked with snow. Now I opt for more modern fabrics. The Uncompahgre Puffy Jacket from First Lite (\$200-\$225; firstlite.com) is plenty warm for spot-and-stalk hunts. The jacket weighs a measly 20 ounces and, thanks to advanced wicking insulations, insulates even when wet—just like wool.

—D.D.

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**Hopper in Hand**  
An Iowa hunter shows off a fine cottontail rabbit.

## HUNTING

# FUN AND GAME

Whether or not you have beagles, winter rabbit hunting is an action-packed blast **By Will Brantley**



**I**'M NO HOUNDSMAN, but even I can distinguish Old Jack's cries from the rest. He's the big, block-headed male in my buddy Ryan's pack of four beagles. When he's on a hot track, it sounds like he's snagged his nether parts in a woven-wire fence. You'd better be on your toes when you hear it, because there's a rabbit coming.

Along the riverbottom, small fields and woolly fencerows meet dense timber, all set in soupy mud, between puddles of standing water. This is swamp-rabbit country. The dogs are going nuts, but they're getting fainter by the second. That doesn't seem to bother Ryan any.

"They'll bring him back around here directly," he says.

My best spot, though, is an old scrapyard on the edge of town. Over the years, locals have abandoned cars and boats, piled up slab lumber and sheets of tin roof, and scattered various other junk. All of it is now grown over with blackberry vines and brambles and is full of rabbits. You just have to watch for nails.

Dogs aren't necessary, and bouncing rabbits isn't rocket science. You just plow through the thickest stuff you can see. Make sure to put a boot on anything that offers overhead cover, whether it's a brushpile, vegetation bent over by weather, a sheet of tin, or a Chevy Chevette. Frequent pauses seem to make bunnies nervous, causing them to dart out of the cover. Most of the thickets you kick will not produce a rabbit—which means that every bunny

Sure enough, within minutes the hounds' voices rise again. It sounds increasingly frantic, as if the dogs are about to catch the rabbit. In fact, the beagles are as apt to be walking as running, and the rabbit is usually 50 to 75 yards ahead, moving at an easy clip, even stopping at times.

That's what this one is doing when we first see him. The dogs are still barking after we shoot, but they don't come into sight until we're over the rabbit. Ryan lets them mouth the bunny's haunches a bit before sending them into the next thicket.

"Y'all kick us out another one," he says.

### GIVE THEM THE BOUNCE

By this time of year, I'm ready for rabbits. I've had enough solitude in a tree-stand, and it's nice to talk aloud with buddies, kick some brush, and usually enjoy plenty of action. Hunting wild bobwhites may be mostly a thing of the past in these parts, but there are still rabbits to be found wherever there are thickets. Clear-cuts and neglected power lines, for example, are good bets. I purposely leave the edges of my deer plots thick and tangled so that I can bounce a bunny or two come December.

that does bolt takes you by surprise, and makes for a fun challenge.

### RABBIT, RUN

Dogs do help, though, in finding rabbits and providing an easier target. Ryan, my former college roommate, has owned beagles his entire life. He says the mark of a good one is that it will burrow down into a brushpile—or underneath a scrapped car—and really spend time nosing around. "Lots of rabbits are missed in places like that," he says, "because some dogs won't get down in there to really look for them."

A flushed rabbit will eventually circle back to the area where it was first jumped. A cottontail may run 100 yards before turning back, but a swamp rabbit may go half a mile or more. Once the chase is really on, the bunny will often abandon cover and hop down the path of least resistance to get back to where it wants to be. The best shooting, therefore, tends to be on ATV trails, logging roads, field edges, and the like. As the dogs give chase, locate and set up on such areas, then keep still. A rabbit won't pay much attention to you, even in the wide open, unless you move.

Having more hunters increases the odds of somebody's getting a shot, of course, but you don't need a big gang. The guy who listens carefully to that lead dog, foresees the likeliest travel routes, and adjusts accordingly will get plenty of shooting either way. If there's a hound in the pack as distinctive as Old Jack, he'll tell you right where you need to stand. **ES**

### GEAR TIP

#### KEEP IT SINGLE

One thing I love about rabbit hunting is that I can grab a single-barrel shotgun that rarely sees use otherwise from the safe. Such a gun is lightweight and a joy to carry all day, broken open in the crook of my arm until it's time to shoot. My sentimental favorite is the 16-gauge Winchester Model 37 that my dad gave me years ago, but if I were buying a new single-barrel rabbit gun, I'd go with an H&R Topper 20-gauge. Having only one shot will cost you a rabbit on occasion, but that just means the chase can go on a little longer. —W.B.



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**Just My Type**

Nick Raftas holds a winter steelhead on Michigan's Pere Marquette.

**FISHING**

## COLD STEEL

When the going gets frosty, play dirty for winter fly-rod chrome **By Joe Cermele**

**I** HE GUY WHO flyfishes for steelhead once a year with his buddies on one of the Great Lakes tributaries from Wisconsin to New York can't wait for fall. The diehard steelheader on those same waters can't wait for winter, because the other guy and his cronies will be long gone. The trade-off, of course, for having a normally crowded river to yourself is that you have to wade in near freezing water, row around ice floes, and coax sluggish fish that have been getting hammered for months. Such are the trials of the fly anglers who call themselves the "chosen frozen," but if you want to join their ranks, these three dirty tricks I picked up while fishing with some of the best can turn you into a hot hand on a bitter-cold day.

**GET THE SKINNY**

In frigid water, you can pretty much forget about a pummeling hit on a swinging streamer. Low and slow wins now, and this means drifting egg flies, fleas, and nymphs (and lots of split shot) right in a steelhead's face. In many regards, the old chuck-and-duck method already takes the sexy out of flyfishing, so rather than try to look like Lefty Kreh in the Arctic, do yourself a favor and respool with a flat running line, such as Cortland's Precision Zip Polypro. Because running line is thin and

slick, it holds less water than fly line. That means your guides will ice up less frequently, so you won't have to clear them as often. Between that and the fact that you'll never have to mend or strip, your hands will stay drier. Running line is also much more sensitive than fly line, so you can keep your gloves on and still feel the take. Yes, using running line may be off-putting to a fly purist, but if you're going to be out in the cold just making 20-foot lobs—not 50-foot casts—all day anyway, I say give yourself every advantage.

**TIE ONE ON**

If you're catching fish, you'll forget about how cold you are in a hurry. If you're snagging, breaking off rigs every 10 drifts, and constantly retying with cold hands, you'll start questioning your sanity in a hurry. That's one reason why I stopped connecting my tippet and leader with Blood knots during winter years ago. Instead, I use a micro barrel swivel. Some may scoff at terminal tackle mixed into a fly rig, but I'll be drifting again while they're trying to make 12 turns in skinny mono with fingertips they can't feel. I've also taken to pre-tying tippet on flies that I know will produce, and stringing them on an old-school snelled hook holder the night before. The less digging for spools in my pack I have to do, the more time I'm in the steel zone.

**DOUBLE DOWN**

Steelhead are very predictable in winter. They'll stack in slow runs and deep pools where they can conserve energy. But just because you know the water in front of you is loaded doesn't mean the fish will readily chew. A big mistake anglers make is pulling lines out when a buddy hooks up. As you take pictures or chase with the net, the pool is resting. In actuality, a hooked fish disrupts the others as it darts and thrashes, causing them to scatter out of the hole momentarily. Often they'll pick up a passing fly as they slide back into their holding pattern. If you're wading and someone hooks a fish above or below your position—and assuming you guys are friends—slip into that spot and get in a few drifts while they fight their fish. A double might make things chaotic, but anything that takes your mind off your numb toes is a good thing.

**GEAR TIP****HEAT SHIELD**

The trick to staying comfortable when fishing in the cold is to strike a balance with apparel that keeps you warm and dry without being heavy or restrictive. The new Windproof Buff (\$4; buffusa.com) has you covered in this department from the shoulders up. Unlike earlier cold-weather Buffs, this one wicks sweat and repels light precipitation thanks to the addition of Gore Windstopper material. A lot comfier than a ski mask, it keeps your neck toasty and comes off easily if you get overheated from running down a steelie.



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THE TOTAL OUTDOORSMAN

# GO IT ALONE

At the end of a long, crowded deer season, nothing beats some quiet time in the woods where the only company you'll encounter is an old loner buck **By T. Edward Nickens**

**T**HE OLD-TIMER STEPPED halfway out of the river cane thicket, where he'd retreated to lick the wounds of the rut. He was alone and reluctant to commit to full exposure. He'd found a welcome sanctuary. The deer looked up the swamp creek and down while I held my breath and narrowed my eyes, but his gaze never settled on my tree. I watched him angle out of the thicket and take a few tentative steps toward the creek. He was in the open now, and I had a bit of time. So I watched. When the old buck put his head down to drink, I eased the rifle to my shoulder and found him in the scope.

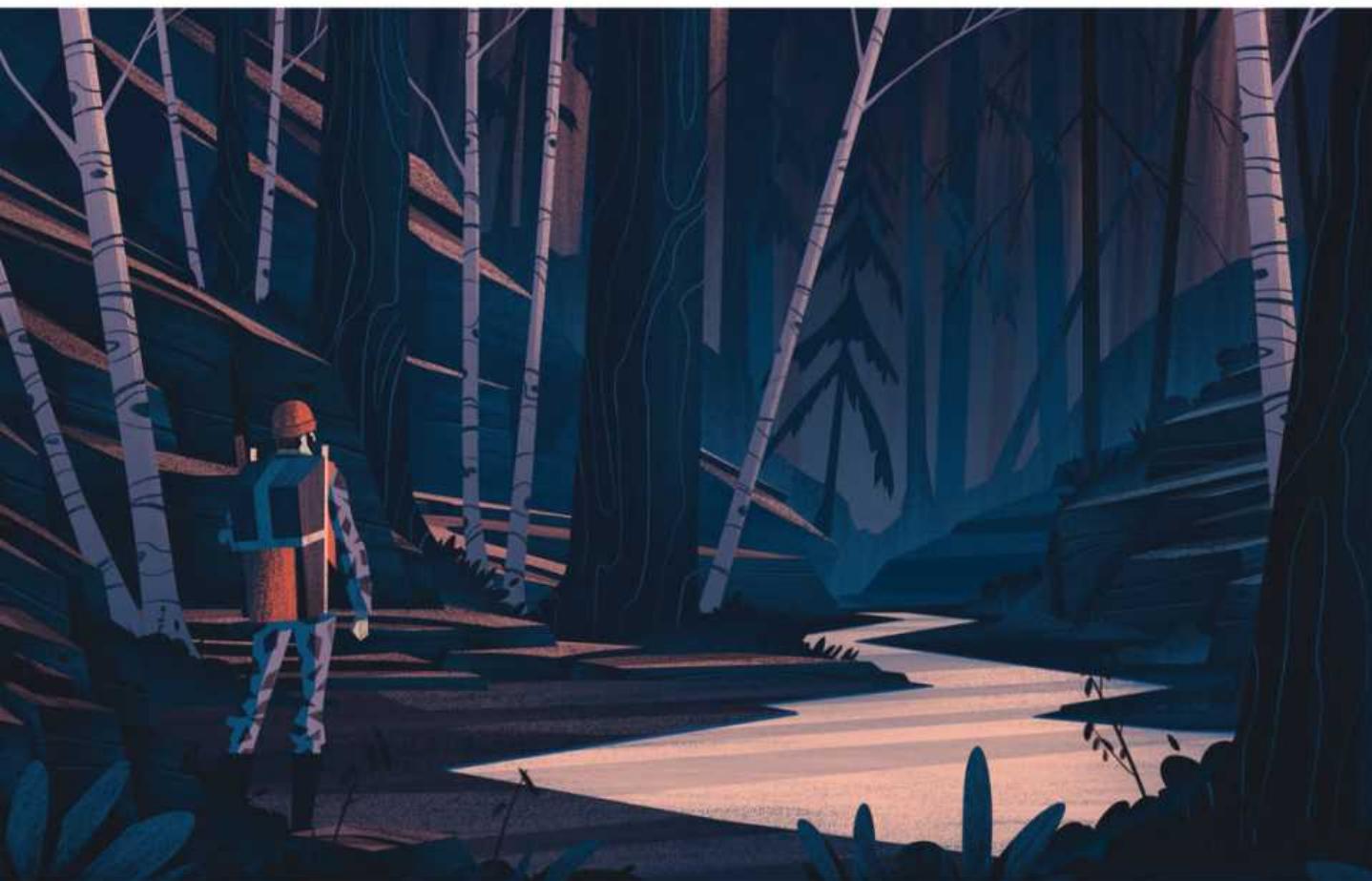
Three hours earlier, I had left the house, alone as well. I drove to the farm, shouldered my daypack, and made my way through the black-dark woods. I found the cat-eye thumbtack that marked the turn toward the swamp, found the tree, and climbed it, all alone. Walking to the stand in the dark cleared my mind of deadlines and overdue bills. *Solvitur ambulando*, St. Augustine called it, this mystic healing power of movement. *It is solved by walking*. In the tree I pulled up my rifle and took a deep breath, listening to my heartbeat downshift. I could hear scattered bird calls in the predawn glow, the drone of insects. That was it. All there was. Me and the dark.

By now we hunters have had the work days, the opening days, the doe days, the rut days, the late nights, the poker nights, the big times at camp. I love the companionship of deer hunting, the camaraderie of hanging stands and clearing shooting lanes. But by now, I'm ready for some time to myself.

Alone, whatever happens is on me. To fidget or not, shoot or not, hit or miss, the blood trailing, the dragging—it's all what I make of it. I love all the rest, but this is what gets me up in the mornings, all alone.

## TWO OF A KIND

A solitary buck, a big buck, this late in the season, had plenty of reason to go it alone, too. The last month had been exhausting, I suspected. He was big enough to have his pick of the does but not without the constant challenge of other bucks that believed their time had come. He walked stiff-legged up the creek. He looked tired and slightly beaten. He had a sag in the belly and was gray around the muzzle. When he turned his head I could see the perfectly symmetrical 8-point rack. He stood there for a long pause, as if gather-



ing his strength. I watched through the scope, my finger off the trigger.

A few months ago, my buddy Scott and I had put this stand up together, and it took us nearly an hour and a half to muscle it into place. The trunk was gnarled with knots and branches. We had to cut our way up the tree, above the canopy of greenbrier and cane, climbing with a linesman's belt, and raising the saws and then the stand with pulleys. We worked together, but all along we knew this was a good place to slip in quietly and go solo.

The buck turned to walk up the creek, through low, winter-dead weeds, quartering away. I've daydreamed about the next few minutes for many hours since: While it seemed as though he walked forever, looking back, moment by moment, I realize I didn't have much time at all. I could hear the gloppy muck sucking at his hooves. He had a front-shoulder limp, worsened by the mud, so he was in no hurry. There was a good 40 yards of clear creek bank in front of him, before the trees closed in, and now that he was in the open and I could see the wide rack, my pulse pounded in my heart, hands, and chest.

The old-timer's unhurried demeanor made it worse. I could have shot that buck a dozen times—should have shot that buck long before now, before his saunter up the creek unleashed a torrent of adrenaline. But still I held my fire, and watched him walk.

The creek hooked to the left, and so did the buck. I held him in the scope for what seemed like a very long time, until I knew it was time, knew that if he took another step the angle wouldn't be right and I wouldn't feel good about the shot. I touched off the trigger. He never took another step. On the ground, he kicked once, then lay still.

#### LASTING IMAGE

He was the biggest buck I've taken in 14 years on the farm, but there were no war whoops, handshakes, or empty platitudes for someone else's camera. Alone, I sat in the stand as my heartbeat softened. The climb down, the drag out, the telling and retelling, the cellphone photos—all of that would come, and all of that could wait. I kept the rifle on the shooting rail and my eye in the scope. I knew these few moments wouldn't last, and I didn't want to disturb the quiet, as if it were a startled bird that at any second might flit away. So I sat in the stand, looking at the buck. Just the two of us, alone.

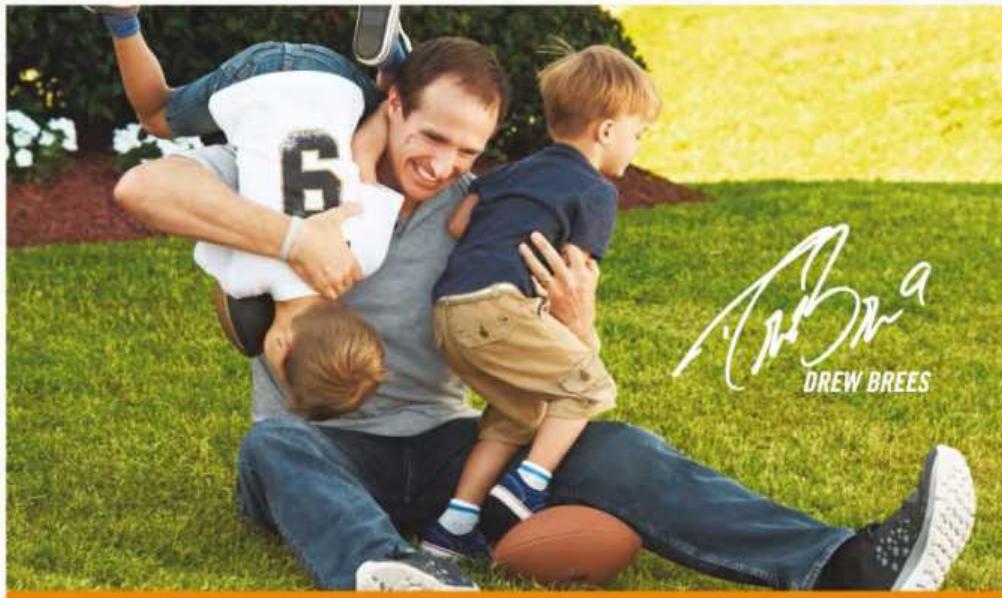
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GEAR TIP



#### NEED A LIFT?

I whiffed on a big buck last year because I hesitated to shoot. As I estimated the chiropractic bills of dragging the deer across a 20-foot beaver dam all by myself, the buck had just enough time to slip into the brush. That won't happen this year. I'm packing a compact cable hoist (\$48; northerntool.com) in the truck so I can drag deer over gullies and across creeks without calling for backup. Or an ambulance. —T.E.N.



  
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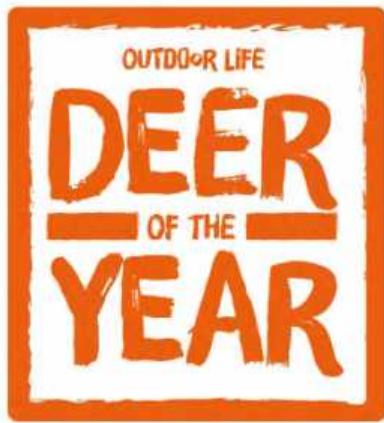
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## CONSERVATION

# HEROES OF CONSERVATION

A backcountry advocate keeps intact wild public land on the Rocky Mountain Front **By Mike Toth**

**I**N 2013, A STATE plan to create road access to the Marias River through the 5,845-acre Marias River Wildlife Management Area, a rare prairie river canyon ecosystem in northern Montana, was unveiled. Greg Munther, chairman of the state chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, immediately began battle plans, mobilizing his membership and that of state hunting and conservation groups. The proposal would also have traded off 483 acres of the WMA along the Rocky Mountain Front in order to gain access to adjacent private land, through which the road would run on its way to a planned recreation site at the bank of the Marias, which Lewis and Clark

had explored 200 years ago.

Munther, a former biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, had seen numerous changes to local habitat during his career and knew that the road would forever change the character of the wild watershed, which is home to mule and whitetail deer, pronghorns, upland birds, waterfowl, and grizzlies.

"It would have dissected the ecosystem," says Munther, 72, about the plan, which was rejected last year due to the continual vocal and written opposition from Munther and his coalition of groups. "You can float the Marias for two days and not see any sign of civilization. I want my grandkids, and their grandkids, to have that same experience." 



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Flare Game

A Montana hunter fires as geese skirt away from the decoy spread.



## SHOTGUNS

## WHEN GEESE GO BAD

Honkers are never tougher to bag than in December. Here's how to score anyway **By Phil Bourjaily**

**G**UESTS AND FISH go bad after three days. It takes geese a little longer, but it happens. After a few weeks of gliding obliviously into your decoys, geese sour on the whole getting-shot thing. They slide off to the sides of decoy spreads, or they hang over the top of them, looking down to pick out the hidden hunters. They land short, or in the next field over.

It takes a strong dose of nasty weather to make bad geese good again. In the meantime, you've got two choices: refuse to shoot anything that isn't backpedaling over the decoys and get blanked; or change your approach, rely on your shooting skills, and put a few of these uncooperative birds in the bag.

## X FACTORS

When geese start skirting my spreads, I downsize. I go by myself or with just one other person to reduce the number of hunters to hide. I also use fewer decoys and spend less time hunting and more time scouting to find the X, as waterfowlers say. A couple of my best late-season hunts last year took place over two dozen full-body decoys. That's all you need if you're where geese want to be.

I use fewer decoys so I can shoot all the way across a small spread to hit birds skirting it. I'm left-handed, so I set my blind slightly behind and to the left side of the dekes. If geese slide off the far side, I turn to my right and take them as 30-yard crossers. If they slide to my side, they come right over me and are out of luck.

Some judicious flagging or clucking can help steer a flock in your direction, but take it easy, because any sound or movement calls attention to you, too. I often leave the flag flat on the ground and flick one wing tip slightly when the geese are inside 100 yards to create just a little bit of movement; that can be enough to vector birds right to me.

Sometimes it's best not to risk alerting them at all. Just put your decoys in a highly visible spot and let them do the work. I did that during a late-season hunt on a hilltop cornfield last year. I put my spread on the highest spot, and after several flocks passed me by, I was rewarded with 100 geese doing a touch-and-go landing right on top of me.

Mixing shells among the full-bodies (or removing the feet from the latter and setting them on the ground) creates the impression of contented geese and ups the odds of skittish birds dropping in as they are supposed to. Most still won't, but you'll be thankful for the few more that do.

## SWING LESSONS

Nothing is easier to hit than a honker that's feet-down over the decoys. Unfortunately you won't get that shot very often when geese go bad. Instead, you'll get crossing and overhead shots. Use the bird's long neck to help you read its line of flight and find the lead. For crossers, mount the gun on the head and keep going to see some daylight between the beak and the barrel.

For the overhead shot, you need a different approach because mounting on the head immediately blots out the bird with the barrel, making it tough to track. You should start behind the

goose, bring the gun through the butt, the belly, the beak, a little farther ahead, then bang. You won't actually see the bird when you pull the trigger, but you will see it as it falls out of the air.

Shooting to your right side (if you're right-handed) is difficult from a layout blind because your swing binds up before you can turn very far. You can add several degrees to your range of motion with a little footwork. I know, it's odd to think about footwork when you're on your back, but try this: Take a step with your right foot as far right as you can go in the blind's boot bag and dig your heel in. Then pull with that heel as you sidestep quickly to the right with your left foot. You'll find you can swing quite a bit farther to the right.

One of the toughest things about shooting geese now is deciding when or whether to pull the trigger, as you'll see a lot of high-altitude, not-quite-committed flocks. The answer is: If they are in killing range, shoot. Pick a bird and focus on the head. And for heaven's sake, when one stupid goose peels off from a just-out-of-range flock and comes in, kill it. This is not

the time of year to get greedy and wait for the whole bunch to give it up, because they probably won't. I have learned that the hard way.

#### BIG GUNS

When geese go bad, you need to go big in terms of guns and shot sizes. This is the time of year when the pain of shooting 3½-inch shells can be worth it, and you want a tight pattern, too, from a Modified or Improved Modified choke. Although you can kill geese that

are hovering over the decoys with size 2 steel, you won't see many of those birds now. Instead, you want bigger, heavier pellets that can plow through feathers, fat, muscle, and bone at 30 yards or more. So break out your carefully hoarded Hevi-Shot or Xtended Range, or go with BBs and BBBs. Reaching out and touching is not enough on longer shots; you need to reach out and hit hard—at least until a cold snap comes and makes bad geese straighten up and fly right again. **ES**

#### GEAR TIP

##### SIT UP AND SHOOT

Some people are too big or too old to come up shooting out of a standard layout blind. For them, there is Cabela's Instinct Wing Shooter layout blind (\$300; [cabelas.com](http://cabelas.com)), which is less of a layout blind and more of a sling chair with a blind around it. It holds you practically upright in total comfort. All you have to do is pop the doors open and shoot. Hunt from one of these, and you may never want to use a layout again. The downside is that it is tall at 30 inches, which makes it harder to hide, and at 30 x 54 x 98 inches, it won't fit inside an SUV even if broken down. It takes a truck or a trailer to haul it. —P.B.



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The 30 states are: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

#### How can I get a payment?

No money will be distributed yet. Class Counsel will pursue the lawsuits against the Non-Settling Defendants. All funds received in this case will be distributed at the conclusion of the lawsuits or as ordered by the Court. You will need to file a valid claim to receive a payment. Notice about the claims process will be provided at a later date.

If you want to receive notice about the claims process or future settlements, you should register at [www.AutoPartsClass.com](http://www.AutoPartsClass.com).

#### What are my rights?

Even if you do nothing, you will be bound by the Court's decisions concerning these Settlements. If you want to keep your right to sue the Settling Defendants regarding a particular component part, you must exclude yourself from that Settlement Class by **March 28, 2016**. If you stay in a Settlement Class, you may object to one or more of the Settlements by **March 28, 2016**.

The Court will hold a hearing on **May 4, 2016** to consider whether to approve the Settlements and approve Class Counsel's request that up to \$2 million be set aside for future litigation costs and expenses. Class Counsel will also request at the hearing, or at a later date, attorneys' fees of up to one-third of the Settlement funds, plus reimbursement of costs and expenses. You or your own lawyer may appear and speak at the hearing at your own expense.

If the cases are not dismissed or settled, Class Counsel will have to prove their claims against the Non-Settling Defendants at trial. Trial has not been set yet.

For More Information or to Register: 1-877-940-5043 [www.AutoPartsClass.com](http://www.AutoPartsClass.com)



ASK PETZAL

# Q & A

**David E. Petzal**

answers your questions  
about guns, shooting,  
hunting, and life



**Q:** What is the biggest animal you have ever shot?

—JACOB R. BUMP,  
STOCKBRIDGE, VT.

**A:** In June 1987, I killed a bull hippo in the Luangwa River Valley in Zambia that probably weighed 6,000 pounds. I used a .458 Winchester, and shot the creature just under the ear. He never twitched.

**Q:** Should I use my old Michigan deer gun, a Marlin 336 in .35 Rem., for timber elk and mule deer in Colorado?

—BILL WILLCOX,  
WALDEN, COLO.

**A:** The Marlin 336 is a fine choice, as is the .35 Remington, if you stick to the timber. Just remember that elk are filled with surprises. You may see only one shooter bull, which will be standing broadside at 350 yards. Meanwhile, you will be holding a rig that is good for 200 yards or less. I'd get something more versatile.

**Q:** I am on a budget and have boiled my rifle considerations down to a Bergara B-14, Tikka T3, or Weatherby Vanguard S2. Make up my mind, would you?

—MATTHEW BRIGGS,  
CUSHING, MAINE

**A:** You've named three of the top hunting rifles available at any price. Pick the winner out of a hat, and you're bound to be happy with the result.

**Q:** I want to use my Ruger American .30/06 to fire 55-grain bullets for varmints. Will the plastic sabot harm the barrel?

—MATT CLARK,  
THESSALON, ONTARIO

**A:** There's no danger of the plastic's harming the barrel, and normal brushing with a phosphor-bronze brush will remove it. I don't think you'll be real happy with the accuracy you get, however. The sabotaged ammo I've tried has not lit up the world.

**Q:** I'm 14 and working toward my Eagle Scout rank. I have to do a service project. I would like it to be rifle-related. Any ideas?

—MATTHEW ADKINS,  
BURLINGTON JUNCTION, MO.

**A:** I never made it past Second Class Scout, so my hat is off to you. Go to your local TV station and see if you can get the resident gun hater to go to the range with you. Try to explain the difference between a cartridge and a bullet. Try to get across that a rifle is only a machine, no better or worse than any other machine. Explain that shooting is a sport of concentration and hand-eye coordination, much like golf. If you can do this, you deserve a meritorious promotion to Eagle Scout.

**Q:** How long can I safely store ammunition?

—ART STONE, AKRON, OHIO

**A:** Modern ammo kept in cool, dry conditions should last at least 50 years.

**At what point did my sacred sport of hunting become the domain of fur-faced, overweight men heralded by the cacophony of country music?**

—NICK WHITE,  
GADSDEN, ALA.

**A:** Something that is good, like hunting or country music, and you turn it into overproduced entertainment for the masses, what you get is outdoor TV and modern country. The latter is wholly unrecognizable from the old "three chords and the truth." It has become background noise—like most of today's so-called music—and it has invaded our sport like bubonic plague bacteria into the bloodstream.



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KILL A  
SUPERBUCK

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LETTING  
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SKIN  
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FEAST YOUR  
EYES

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FIERCE OBJECTS  
OF DESIRE

LUCKY  
ME

## THIS IS THE TROPHY ISSUE.

The words *hunting*, *fishing*, and *trophy* are inextricably intertwined. We all dream about coming home with fish the size of a human leg or deer big enough to pull a plow, but it's more complicated than that.

Some trophies are official. The most valuable ones are not. Those, we award ourselves. Sometimes they're for outright failure, and sometimes they have nothing at all to do with either victory or defeat. A friend of mine used to pick up and save a rock from wherever he went with a gun. Since he did a lot of hunting he eventually acquired a considerable collection of rocks and, when he built a home, had them incorporated into a fireplace. He could tell you where each rock came from and the story behind it. Those were his trophies.

A fellow I never had the privilege of meeting, Hap was his name, was a dedicated elephant hunter (this was back in the 1960s, before poachers had killed all the big elephants) but had never gotten a 100-pounder, which means a bull, each of whose tusks weighs at least that amount. Hap had a standing order with his PH to call him if he ever saw such a beast, and he would catch the next plane to Africa.

Hap got that call, and the prognosis that he would shortly die of cancer, on the same day. But he went to Africa, already in agony, and met the PH, and they picked up the track of a huge old bull. Elephant hunting means serious walking, day after day, and that is what they did, and there is no way to calculate the anguish that came with that walk, but finally it ended when they came upon the bull at a water hole.

The elephant had been pushed as far as he was going to go. He lifted his trunk and flared his ears, the sign of a charge. Hap brought up his rifle and fired both barrels in the air. And then he went home and died the terrible death that awaited him.

The trophy Hap brought back was the elephant's life, which he did not take.

Some trophies can be whimsical, or odd. I have one that's both: It is a dead tsetse fly that I gassed in my tent in Zambia. Tsetse flies are Satan's own air force. Every day I would go out in the blazing heat and have my blood drunk by the little fiends, and when I saw this one sitting on the screen of my tent, something snapped.

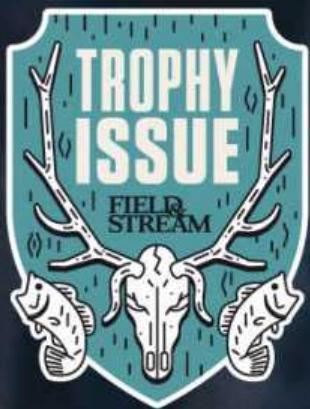
I picked up a can of carcinogenic South African fly spray, said, "Eat poison, bug!" and gave him a toot. He dropped dead, and I picked up his corpse and put it in one of the envelopes that I used to collect spent bullets.

He's still in fine shape, except for being dead, and every now and then I like to take him out and ask, "How'd you like that last meal, you little son of a bitch?"

Whatever is important to you, award yourself a trophy for it. No one else will.

By DAVID E. PETZAL

Typography by MUOKKAA STUDIOS



X Kill a



#### Jaw-Dropper

A Wisconsin colossus hits a winter cornfield to feed.

YOU KNOW THAT LEGENDARY DEER THAT NO ONE CAN KILL? THE ONE THAT NEVER SHOWS BEFORE DARK, IGNORES YOUR CALLS, SKIRTS YOUR MOCK SCRAPES, AND RUNS AWAY FROM YOUR DECOY? WELL, YOU'RE GOING TO TAG HIM THIS MONTH. HERE'S HOW

BY SCOTT BESTUL

# Superbuck



*Some bucks stand apart. It's not that their antlers are bigger (though they often are). It's not that they dominate the herd (because they often don't). These bucks simply don't act like other whitetails. They're loners, rarely seen, even during the rut. They're sedentary, mostly nocturnal, and hyperfocused on survival. They are superbucks. What they all have in common is old age; they've run the gauntlet of hunters, predators, disease, and weather and survived when other bucks couldn't. The good news: They are at their most vulnerable right now. Here are the stories of five such bucks—and the late-season hunters who found a way to put a tag on them.*



## SUPERBUCK #1: THE RETURN CUSTOMER

**Stats:** 188 7/8" B&C, 5 1/2 years old, Iowa

**Hunter:** Mark Drury (druryoutdoors.com)

**Tactic:** Plant a winter buffet



### \* THE HUNT

■ "I first saw this buck when he was 3 1/2 years old and already in the 160s," Drury says. "I immediately issued a hands-off policy on him." At age 4, the buck was a giant, but very tough to kill. "I'd have tons of pictures of him from July through October, and then he'd just disappear."

pear." He would always come back in the late season, though, because he knew where the food grew. Each season, Drury plants multiple plots specifically for that time of year.

"I had pictures of him all last summer again, and he was even bigger. I hunted him hard all through October, only to learn I was chasing a ghost. When I checked trail cams at the end of the month, I didn't have a single shot of him. He'd left the farm early."

When December came, Drury felt con-

fident that the buck would return for the late-season grub.

It was bitter cold, with no snow, on Dec. 23, and Drury went right to one of the green brassica plots. "Guess which was the first deer on that field? He gave me a 60-yard shot with my muzzleloader, and I was lucky enough to kill one of my biggest bucks. Everyone loves November, but I think December is the best month to target one of these big, old bucks. Because their greatest weakness is not the rut, it's food."

### \* THE TAKEAWAY

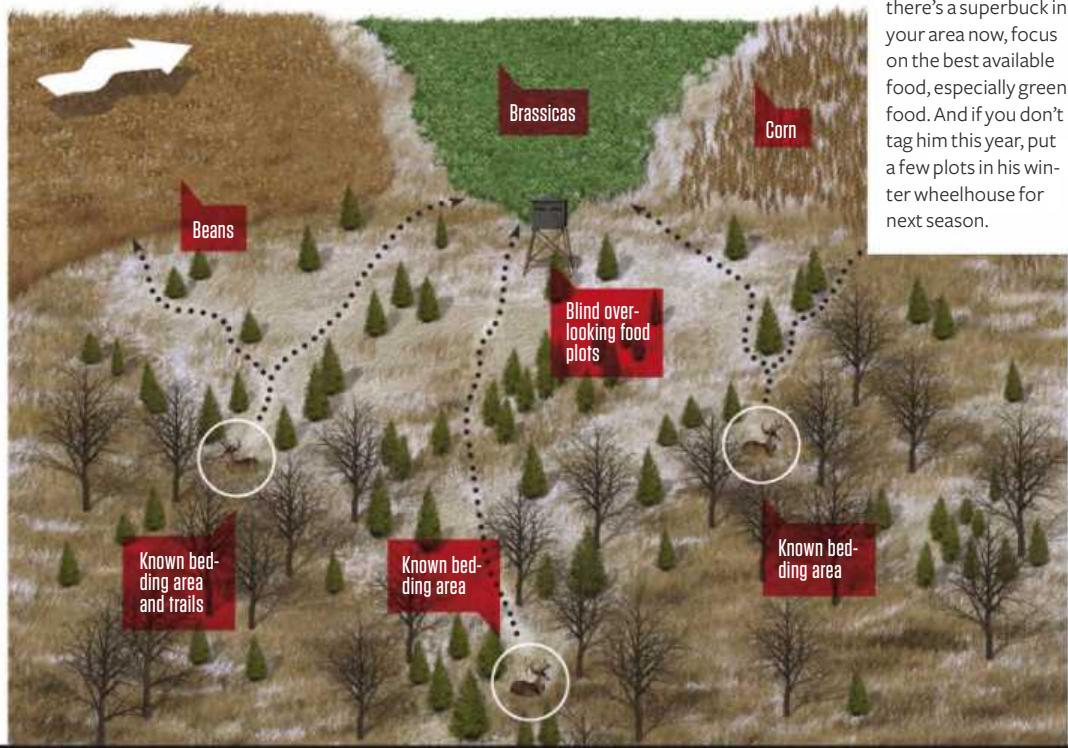
■ First, historical data on the seasonal move-



**Greens Machine** A huge 10-point eats turnip tops.

ments of individual deer can be a huge help in pinning down a superbuck. Drury's trail-cam photos told him not only that the buck would return in the late season, but also what part of the farm he liked to hole up in. Second, it pays to plant specifically for the late season, when big deer are vulnerable. Drury has this

down to a science. "We plant corn and beans, in case there's a lot of snow and shorter plants are covered up. Next to them we plant a low, green food source like Bio-Logic turnips or brassicas. If deer can get at it, there's nothing they want more than a green food source." If there's a superbuck in your area now, focus on the best available food, especially green food. And if you don't tag him this year, put a few plots in his winter wheelhouse for next season.

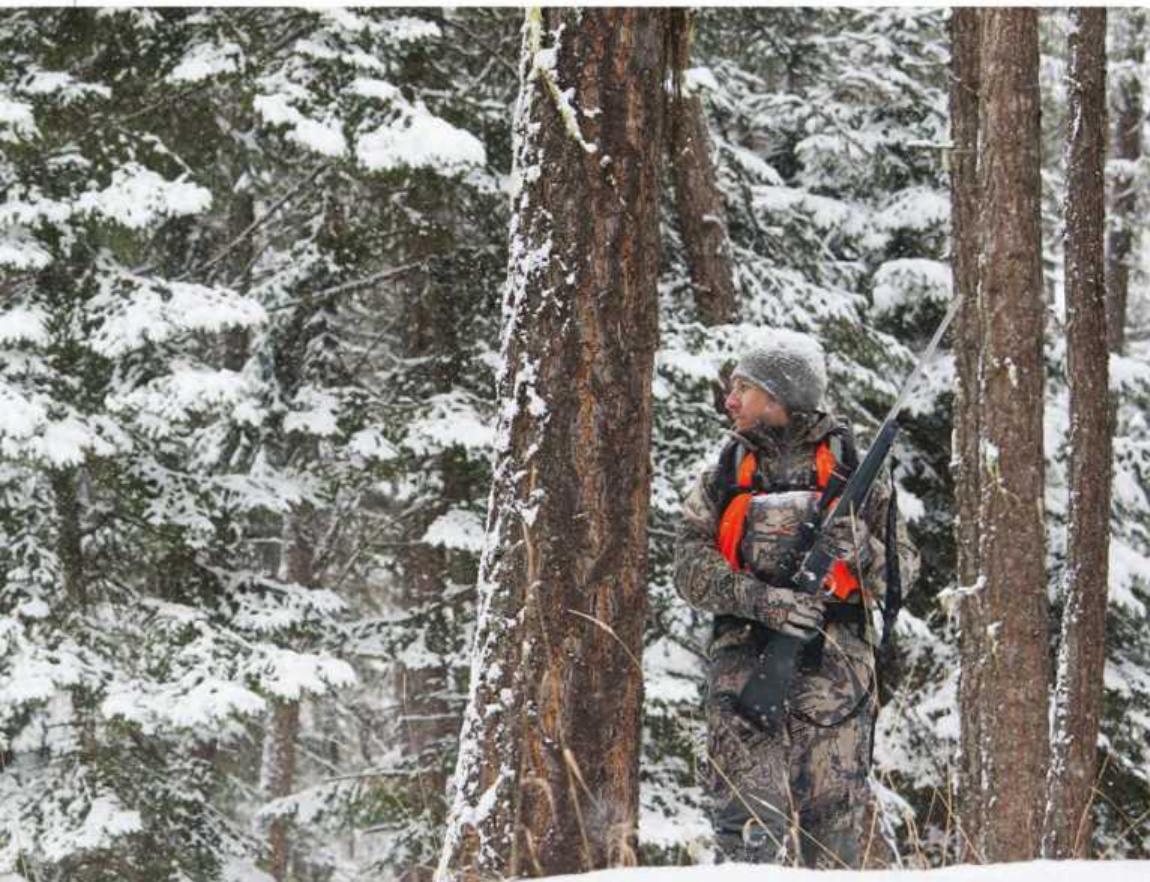


### \* HOW SUPERBUCKS BEHAVE



### THEY HAVE SMALLER HOME RANGES

Telemetry research across the country shows that as a buck ages, his home range (the place where he spends 90 percent of his time) tends to shrink. The latest studies in Louisiana, Maryland, and Pennsylvania put the average adult buck's home range at between 269 and 559 acres, far smaller than the long-accepted square mile. A truly old buck's range will be smaller still. This, combined with their tighter core areas (see next page), makes superbucks tough to locate. But there's good news: Once you do find one, you can (carefully) stay on him, because he's not going far.



**Winter Watch**  
A late-season hunter monitors a conifer sanctuary.

HOW  
SUPERBUCKS  
BEHAVE



THEIR CORE  
AREAS  
ARE SMALLER

Core areas (where a buck spends at least 50 percent of his time) are also significantly smaller for older bucks. Deer in the previously mentioned studies had core areas as small as 59 acres; the largest was 86 acres. So, there could be a giant living on your back 80.

**My Trophy**

**A LASTING CONNECTION**

I don't suppose many anglers give much thought to barrel swivels. I never did. Not until I was sitting in a Steak & Shake in Port St. Lucie, Fla., at midnight, rolling a Sampo swivel with double welded rings back and forth in my palm. At the time, it had yet to sink in that I was holding the most meaningful piece of terminal tackle of my life. Two hours earlier, it was the glue that held together a 300-pound mono shock leader and a 5-foot length of heavy steel cable.



At the other end of that cable was the 12-foot, 475-pound hammerhead that I was fighting from the beach.

For two days and a night, my friend Zach Miller and I had sat on the sand with only a nurse shark to show for our efforts. On our second night, with hope waning, I was packing Miller's truck to head to another spot when I heard him screaming from the other side of the dune. The shark ate at 8:30 P.M. One hour and 45 minutes later, I

stood dumbfounded in the lapping surf as Miller released the biggest fish I've ever caught back into the Atlantic. A lot could have gone wrong during that intense tug-of-war, the failure of that swivel being just one possibility. It hangs from my rearview mirror now, and reminds me that the smallest elements of fishing—a strong knot, a sharp hook, a properly greased fly—can spell the difference between heartbreak and glory. —Joe Cermele

## GIANT WINTER BUCKS

# SUPERBUCK #2: THE FENCELINE LONER

**Stats:** 181" B&C, 5½ years old, Kansas

**Hunter:** Jason Woodruff, guided by Keaton Kelso, co-owner of K&K Outfitters

**Tactic:** Set up and wait



### \* THE HUNT

■ Last year during the rut, Kelso spotted this monster buck with a doe out in the middle of a field. When he stopped to glass him, the deer bolted into a patch of trees and grass no bigger than an acre. He'd never gotten the deer on camera. "So I got to thinking that maybe that tiny patch of cover was where this old buck was living," Kelso says. "We get deer like that sometimes—largely nocturnal bucks that

just hang in a very small area and hardly ever leave."

An overgrown fence line ran through the little woodlot, so Kelso hung a stand on each side. "It wasn't easy; I just imagined that buck lying in there, listening while I hung each set." The next challenge was convincing a hunter to wait out a buck where he was practically guaranteed not to see many deer. Woodruff agreed and sat dark to dark for two days without seeing a deer. Finally, a half hour after daybreak on the third day, the buck got out of his bed and walked down the fence line, and Woodruff shot him at 15 yards.



**Heads Up** A Montana monster scans the prairie.

### \* THE TAKEAWAY

■ Waiting out an old buck is tough but worth it. "The third morning we were having breakfast and I asked Jason if he was ready to go back. He really dragged his feet before saying 'What if I need a break?' I told him we'd have to put someone else in there, so he went—and it paid off huge."



**My Trophy**

### THE FUR-BEARING FISH

The origin of this fur-bearing fish dates to a time when a basically truthful fellow who had done no more than stretch the length of a trout felt the first calling of fiction.

The fish that bit the hook resembled a rainbow trout, but the mind's eye saw a creature spawned considerably farther to the north. A musty steamer trunk produced the garment suitable for the angler's invention—a moth-eaten stole that his grandmother had worn. Patches of this he glued to the fish's bones, after which he presented the trophy as a Christmas gift to his family, complete

with a typewritten tale of its adventures under the polar ice cap (mercifully lost). When the ornaments came down, the trophy was relegated to the garage, where insect larvae completed a task begun with a fillet knife, and after 20 years of exile it was deemed bug-free enough for permanent display.

Today the fur-bearing fish resides in a place of honor above the mantel, while the man before the fire pens murder mysteries. A professional liar now (his wife might argue the *now*), he needs only to lift his eyes to see where the mischief began.

—Keith McCafferty

### HOW SUPERBUCKS BEHAVE



### THEY MOVE LESS

Noted whitetail researcher Mickey Hellickson has studied truly old bucks more than anyone, and all his telemetry work points to one conclusion: "The older bucks get, the less active they are," he says. "They're like old men that would rather sit on the porch than go for a run. They just spend a lot of time on their bellies, and that makes them tough to kill." So just because you're not getting regular trail-cam pics, it doesn't mean he isn't still around. And just because he doesn't show on your first hunt, it doesn't mean he won't on the third, or seventh. Hunting a super-buck demands a conscious decision and a commitment to focus on a single trophy.

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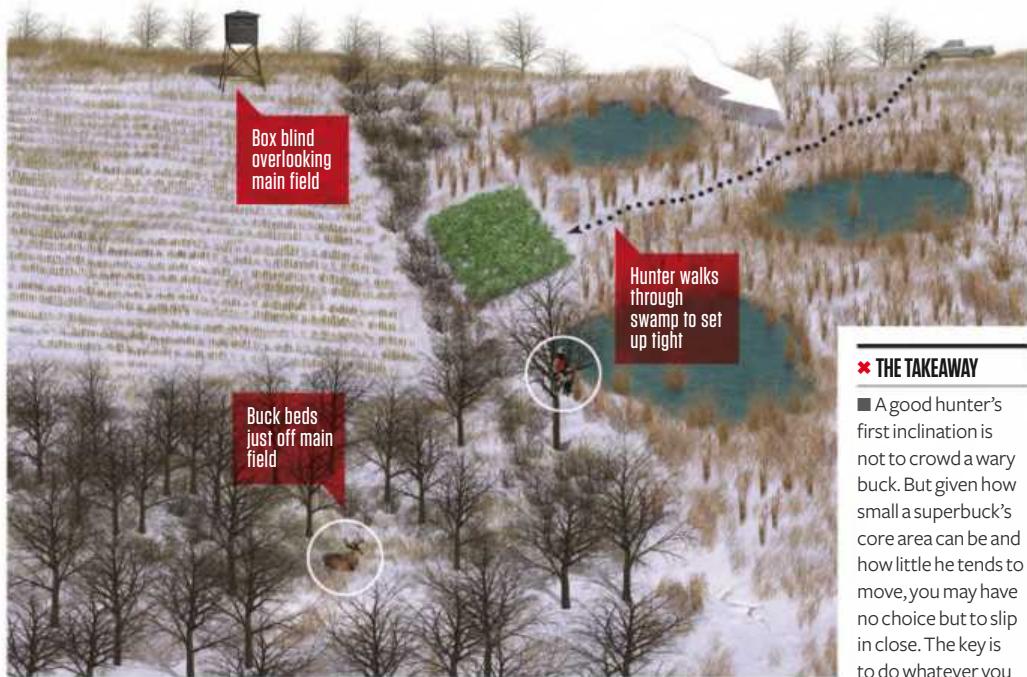
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## GIANT WINTER BUCKS



### HOW SUPERBUCKS BEHAVE



#### THE TAKEAWAY

■ A good hunter's first inclination is not to crowd a wary buck. But given how small a superbuck's core area can be and how little he tends to move, you may have no choice but to slip in close. The key is to do whatever you must to avoid spooking him. "I walked over half a mile in the dark, through wet, swampy muck to approach him, but it was the only way to keep from being scented or seen," says Clifford. And he was prepared to go out the same way. Luckily, he didn't have to.

**Heavy Sleeper** An old main-frame 8 is well hidden in a patch of tall goldenrod.

## SUPERBUCK #3: THE SWAMP HERMIT

**Stats:** 179 $\frac{5}{8}$ " B&C, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  years old, Kentucky

**Hunter:** Mark Clifford, owner of Premier

**Outfitters Tactic:** Slip in the back door



#### THE HUNT

■ "We called him the Ivory Buck because unlike our usual chocolate-racked whitetails, his antlers were bone-white and huge," Clifford says. The deer lived in a small patch of woods by a large field. Not wanting to penetrate the timber with a treestand, Clifford put rifle hunters in a shooting house overlooking the cropfield.

Over the course of four seasons, several clients saw the Ivory Buck from that house. "But he just would not stick his nose into that field for a good shot, even during the rut. We never once saw him chase a doe."

In Jan. 2012, Clifford was done guiding, but the season was still open and he had a bow tag. "My head guide spotted the Ivory Buck in daylight, hitting a little food plot off the timber. We figured the cold weather was motivating him to feed. But I knew I'd have to do something

different to kill him with a bow."

Clifford decided to move tight to the timber to catch the buck en route to the food plot, and he laid out a long, circuitous approach to avoid getting busted on the way in. For two days straight, he and a cameraman sat in cold and snow and never saw a deer.

Though his cameraman was less than enthused, Clifford decided to give it one more shot, and just after noon on the next day, he saw a huge-bodied deer approaching. "I knew instantly that it was the Ivory Buck." The deer walked to within 75 yards, then bedded down in a patch of grass for 45 minutes. "I had to stand there, motionless, the entire time. Finally the buck got up, walked

to within 15 yards, and spotted us in the tree. I was at full draw when he stomped his foot, turned to leave, and gave me a perfect bow shot."

The buck's rack had 8-inch bases and was totally unbroken. He dressed at 265 pounds, with rolls of fat. "I doubt he did any fighting. He was just a buck that didn't participate in the rut."



#### THEY BREED DIFFERENTLY

A recent Texas study showed that mature bucks used only 30 percent of their home range during the rut and often returned to "focal points" of activity every 24 to 28 hours.

That is, they don't waste time bombing over the landscape; they know where does are and go there. Also, UGA researcher Dr. Karl V. Miller says his work proves that "does assess the bucks in an area, and we've seen them go a mile out of their home range to find what they want." In short, a stud whitetail may not have to find does because does will find him. So if you're counting on your superbuck to make a big move during the rut, don't.



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HOW  
SUPERBUCKS  
BEHAVE



SOME  
DON'T BREED  
AT ALL

Another Texas study, which matched the DNA from fawns with that of known mature research bucks, showed that 30 percent of the males never sired a fawn during a rut. On one hand, it goes against everything most hunters think about mature bucks. On the other, the lone buck that seems to have no interest in does is almost a cliché among dedicated trophy hunters. Whether this is the result of a personality trait or a hardcore survival tactic isn't known. But rattling antlers, calls, and decoys are more apt to send these bucks packing than bring them running.

**Cover Boy** A tank-bodied Ontario buck stays tight to the thick stuff.



## SUPERBUCK #4: THE HELL-PATCH MONSTER

**Stats:** 147" B&C, 5½ years old, Mississippi  
**Hunter:** Will Primos, founder of Primos Game Calls ([primos.com](http://primos.com)) **Tactic:** Build a bedroom



### THE HUNT

“It ended up being a straightforward hunt for a buck that we only had night pictures of,” says Primos. The buck was old and heavy-racked and Primos had plenty of photos of him, but no one had seen him on the hoof. It was mid January and the rut was over. “I was discussing strategy with my cameraman Zach Frazee before the hunt, and we decided to try an old clear-cut we call the Hell Patch.”

Primos and his crew create 5- to 15-acre cuts, recognizing that they won’t be good for at least five seasons. “We pick a good stand tree or two for different winds, cut everything around them, and then come back and put a food plot close to the stand trees.” Primos felt the Hell Patch would be good because it was post-rut and mature bucks would be eating hard, trying to recover from the rut. “We snuck in about 1 P.M. and got set up, and within an hour we watched a buck stand up, walk into the plot, and give me a good shot. It was the big 8-point that had been showing

up on camera. That’s the thing about these mature bucks; they’re so efficient at finding and breeding does during the rut that you hardly ever see them. But when breeding is over, they’ve got to eat.”

### THE TAKEAWAY

Sometimes it takes planning to kill a superbuck. Primos’s aggressive habitat work doesn’t pay immediate dividends, but it provides the small hidey-holes that savvy old bucks tend to favor, as well as the late-season food that all deer count on to recover from the rut and ready themselves for winter. Ask yourself: *Where would a superbuck hole up on my property?* If you can’t think of a spot, make one.



My Trophy

### LOVE FEATHERS

Leave it to the French to come up with a fancy name for a duck’s butt. *Cul de canard*, those sweeping feather loops perched atop a mallard’s tail, are the duck hunter’s most distinctive trophy, equaled only by the long sprig of a bull pintail.

A mature mallard can have two full curls, with three being a real trophy. So emerald in color that they’re almost black, the feathers are likely used to attract members of the opposite sex. Back when I was in my bachelor days, I would put the feathers to a similar purpose: More than a few women whom I dated received love letters from me with a *cul de canard* tucked inside the envelope. At first, the objects of my affection found the feathers romantic—but for any lady who lasted through fall, the tokens became bitter symbols of my absence during duck season.

I’m no longer single, but I still pluck the mallard’s curls and place them in letters to friends and family. Others get stuck in random places inside my truck or around the house, small reminders of hunting season, and the foolish courtship rituals of both mallards and man.

—David Draper

## SUPERBUCK #5: THE OLD PHANTOM

**Stats:** 120" B&C, 8½ years old, Pennsylvania  
**Hunter:** Kip Adams, outreach director, QDMA (qdma.com) **Tactic:** Hunt ignored cover



### \* THE HUNT

“During the 2006 season I started getting trail-cam photos of a really nice buck for our area,” says Adams. It was a clean 8-point with a big body, and easy to spot on camera because he had a damaged right ear that hung down along his neck. Although photos showed that for two years straight

the buck was all over the 700-acre tract Adams hunts, none of his hunting party ever laid eyes on him.

When the 2008 rifle season opened, Adams decided he needed to try a different area on the farm. “I own 35 acres behind our cabin that everyone usually ignores. On the fifth day of the rifle season I headed to that area.” There was a standing cornfield and a small creek flowing along one edge, with very dense brush on the other side. “I set up right along the creek; I just stood behind

a big boulder and looked downstream at a crossing that deer would use heading out of the brush to the cornfield.”

Right at last light, Adams heard a deer coming to the crossing. “When it got to the bank I could see it was a good buck. I took the shot, and when I walked up to the deer I knew instantly it was that broken-ear buck.”

Later Adams pulled the jawbone and sent a tooth in to be aged; the buck

was 8½ years old. “That was more exciting to me than any antler score.”

### \* THE TAKEAWAY

Adams’s buck is a perfect example of a hard-hunted deer that was hyperaware of its environment. “I think he did a wonderful job of patterning us,” Adams says. “He knew exactly where our areas of greatest activity were, and he adapted. Shooting him in that overlooked spot totally changed how we

**Deer Crossing** A big-bodied New York 10-point wades in.

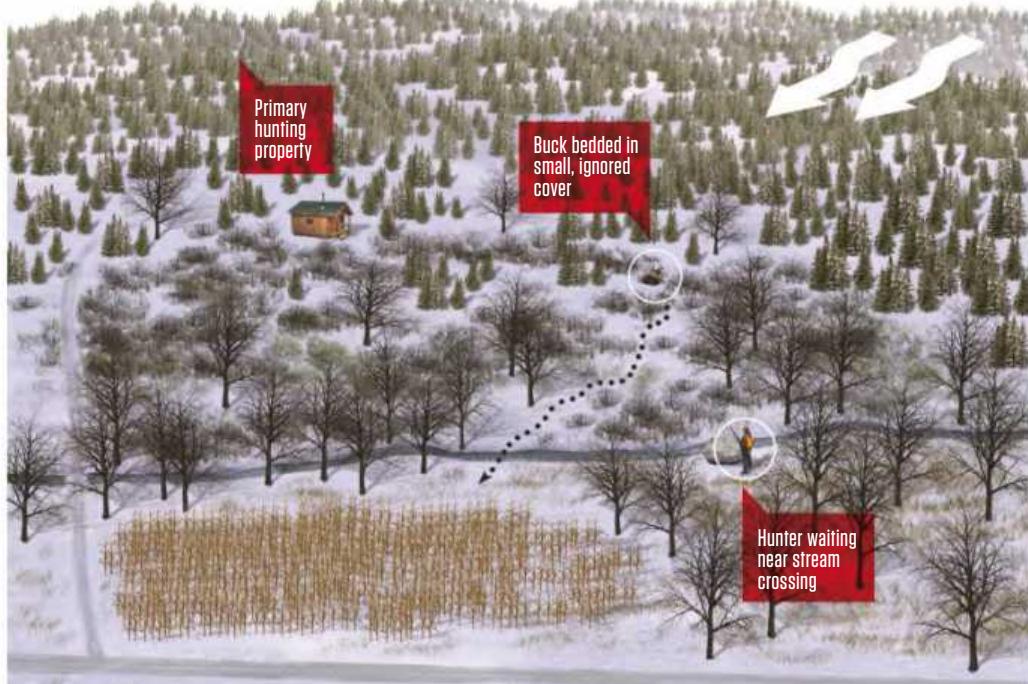
hunt the property.” Since then, his group has gone out of their way to hang stands in new spots, and it’s made a huge difference. Sixteen of the last 17 shots at bucks have come from new stands. As hunters, it’s very easy to fall into a routine, but superbucks will simply relocate. “That buck taught us to be less predictable, and to constantly search for new spots.”

### HOW SUPERBUCKS BEHAVE



### THEY ARE HYPERFOCUSED ON SURVIVAL

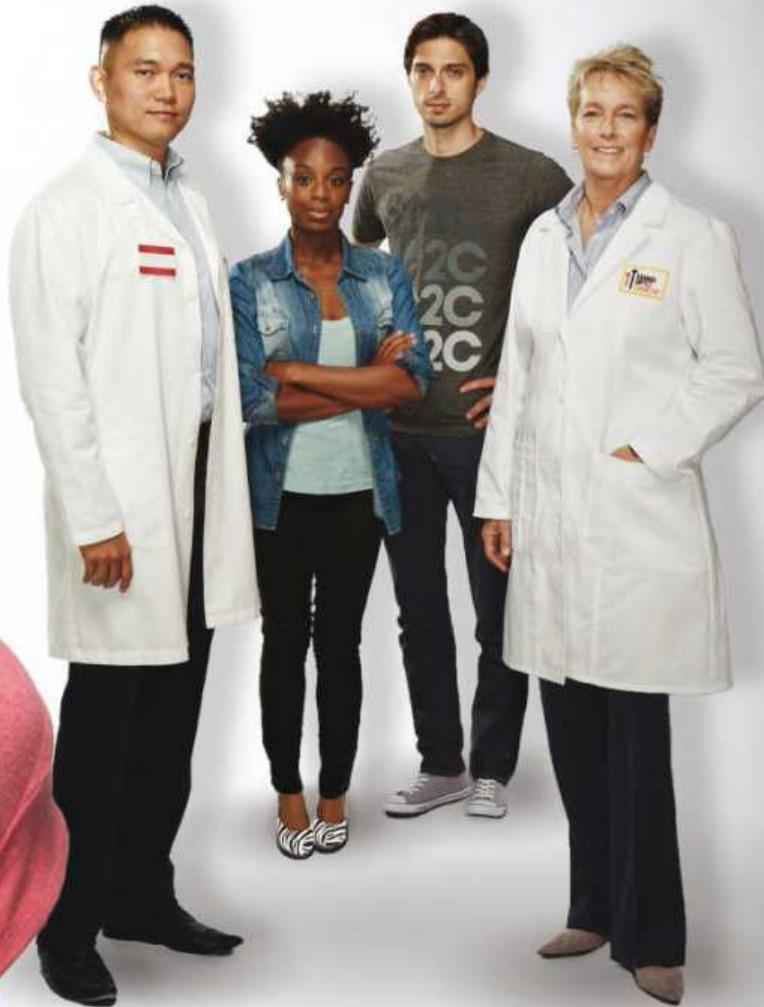
Anecdotal evidence supports what science suggests: These old loner bucks do whatever it takes (even forgoing breeding) to avoid trouble. A friend of mine once saw a 200-inch buck lie on its belly in a field to hide from a 140-inch 8-pointer. Another knew a giant that bedded under his tree-stands and was always, uncannily, there waiting for him. To tag a superbuck you have to hunt smarter than anyone else—and get lucky.





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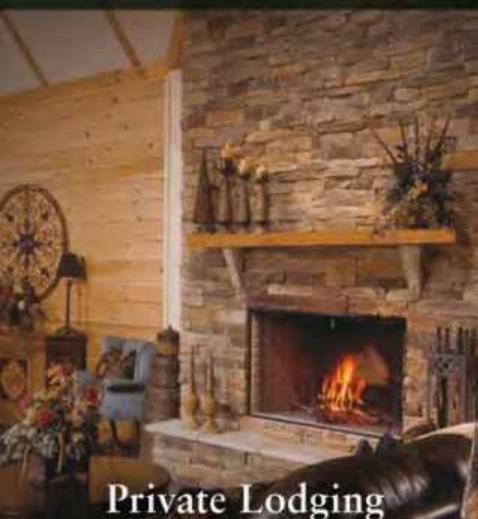
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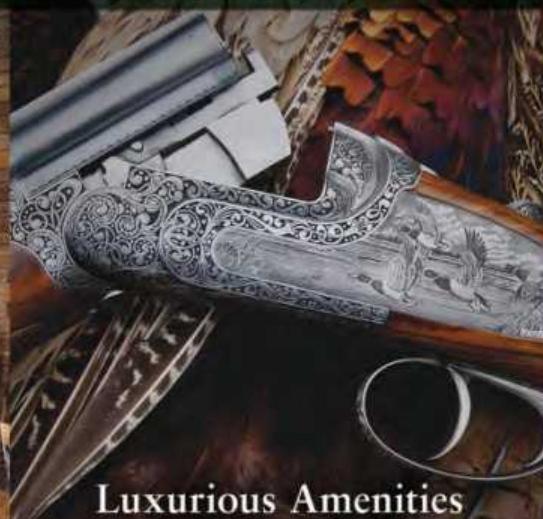
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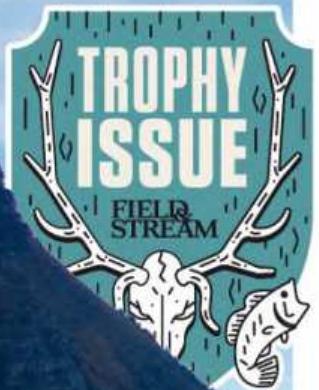


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# JUIC

WHEN THE AUTHOR UNEXPECTEDLY DREW A MOUNTAIN GOAT TAG, HE WAS FORCED TO CONFRONT THE POSSIBILITY OF SHOOTING AN ANIMAL HE HAD LITTLE INTEREST IN KILLING. THAT IS, ASSUMING THE DANGEROUS COUNTRY DIDN'T KILL HIM FIRST

BY RICK BASS

# WYOMING



COME GET ME

A TROPHY GOAT STRADDLES  
THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE.

**O ACCUSTOMED HAD** I became to mailing in the permit application and not drawing a tag—a 1 percent chance—that each year I forgot about it. The act was nothing more than tossing a penny into a fountain, a repeated gesture, not for the hopes of the wish.

I wasn't home the day the mail came—a big packet. My youngest daughter, Lowry, called and was more excited than I was. I hadn't thought I'd ever get one, not in this life.

### → **EARLY DOUBTS**

The goat season starts in early September and runs to the last day of November. I read books about goats, but didn't scout; I was traveling all summer. And I was ambivalent. They're just so... well, *cute*. Lovable, adorable. Friends who knew I'd drawn a goat permit were checking in, asking, and I was candid with them about my ambivalence. "I don't know," I said. "I'm not feeling it yet. I might be able to make a hunt right before pheasant season."

I knew I wasn't behaving with the desire that any quarry deserves to have directed toward it, but it was an honest response. My experience has been that the best way to find an animal is to hold some form of that challenging balance between wanting and not wanting, and then to enter the landscape, learn it, and see what happens.

My FedEx driver had gotten a goat permit 20 years earlier, had shot one, then promptly had suffered a heart attack. There was a part of me that worried it wasn't coincidence, but high-mountain karma: That one has to think hard, and be right and pure, to hunt such an animal, in such country. That it shouldn't be entered into lightly, or even for *mere* sport.

Sometimes I wonder if there are animals that just aren't meant to be hunted. *Why do we hunt what we hunt? Why a pheasant but not a robin? Why a goose but not an eagle?* I wanted to burn incandescent, phosphorescent: I wanted to burn white. But about the goat, I couldn't. There was no history of pursuit or desire, no tradition. *Is this what it's like, I wondered, for people who have never hunted before?*

I waited, trying to summon the fire to kill a white goat. To begin thinking

**HEAD TURNER**  
A MONTANA BILLY  
STANDS ON  
RUGGED TERRAIN.

about it, and see if, over time, that space could fill just as surely as if I were trying to hunt myself into shape physically.

I was pretty sure I wasn't going to kill a goat if I saw one. But I had applied for a permit, and drawn one; and in that strange moral calculus in which hunters so often find themselves, which seems to nonhunters like paradox, I realized that I owed it as a gesture of respect to play this out: to seek the goat in order to seek the answer to that question. To possess the permit and not go into the country in which goats lived was an act of disrespect to the goats, to their wild country, and to myself. I didn't have to kill one. But I had to go in and look.

### → **FRESH TRACKS**

September in this part of the world still feels like summer. It was a strange sensation, hunting in such heat. It felt like I should be wearing shorts and a Hawaiian shirt. I knew the shaggy beasts would be in the cool shade, wherever that was, up high, almost surely on a north slope, and if they could find any



remnant patch of snow left over from last year, that was where they might be.

I knew of such a place, and climbed toward it. I imagined the goats lying there, panting like dogs, the wind ruffling their long white fur. And still again, I did not want to kill one. The rifle in my hand felt like a bazooka; I felt like a fraud.

I started before dawn, and reached the high mountain lake I was bound for in early afternoon. This region of Montana is stippled with such lakes, and over in the designated wilderness there are goats. But they are goats that have seen humans, and while they don't ap-

proach the humans, they don't always run. I was looking for goats that would run, which was why I was over in these other mountains—a wilder, more sprawling range, but just as jagged.

A long time ago I had seen a goat here—a dead goat. In September, I'd bushwhacked into this lake from a different route, and my attention had been drawn by the sight of two eagles soaring in tight circles at the top of an avalanche chute, in which an ice tongue lingered, top to bottom.

At the top of the chute were three grizzlies—one large and two small, young of the year. They were 800 yards away. I watched as the three of them slid, one at a time, like children taking turns on a playground slide, down that long chute of dirty ice, into the gaggle of ravens and a lone eagle gathered at the scrappy feast below—scattering them, then, like raven bowling pins, the black birds leaping up and out of the way in a kind of reverse-cyclone, rising more quickly than the eagle, which appeared to lift in slow motion.

So I knew where I wanted to go. When I arrived at the glimmering blue lake, there was, surprisingly, another human being. He was walking around picking up scraps of litter from lakeside campfire rings. We visited for a while—despite the remoteness of the location, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was talking to the groundskeeper, with his spear-tipped pickup pole, in an urban park—and he gestured toward the lakeshore and told me that he had seen some fresh goat tracks in the mud there.

"Ah, I was afraid of that," I said. "I guess I'll go in the opposite direction. I don't want to walk up on a goat that's become used to seeing people."

*How do you even hunt goats?* I had no idea. Like a kindergartner, I'd checked out books from the library. The pictures in them did not dispose me further to want to kill a goat. The nannies with their kids, snuggled into rock turrets like clubhouses. The blue sky in which they seemed to float. The supreme fittedness, the improbability, of their existence, clinging to life on cliffs: living on stone, as if living on nothing but air and rock; as if living only on thought. The wildest of dreams

made manifest. I think it's wrong to kill something you don't know. It's hard enough to kill something you do know. Would I learn more about goats, in another month or two? I didn't know.

### → A DIFFERENT BEAST

That was hot September. After that, I had to travel more. I had not built my autumn around the idea of killing a white animal. When I had time, I went out looking for elk and for birds.

Why had I applied? Maybe because I knew enough about myself, after 56 years, that it would encourage me to get up early and hike long days, into wild country where I might not otherwise have gone. Without the golden ticket, I would likely have stayed in the lowlands, hunting only the familiar.

I realized also that many of the other animals I had grown up hunting, and learned to hunt, were generalists. No small number of them benefited from agriculture and disturbance. Mourning doves, whitetail deer. Among them, the elk were wildest—found in the farthest reaches of the backcountry. The bobwhite quail of my youth had evolved a splendid relationship with fire and grassland, drought and rain, moisture and grass—little buzz bombs of yearning. And the wild turkeys, too, were magnificent. They could prosper in tilled fields as well as in the old hardwood bottoms still relatively untouched by man. But to hunt a goat would be something beyond my old limits.

I kept thinking about my FedEx driver's heart attack, and the deep caution I'd felt; the idea that the two events, his heart attack and the seeking of that sculpted treasure, were somehow con-

nected. There was no judgment in the emotion. I simply filed it away and told myself, *That wouldn't apply to me.*

### → PROCEED WITH CAUTION

I did want to *see* a goat. I wanted to walk along the stony ridges that their kind needed. Not tolerated, but needed. Sky-walkers. Humans and eagles, their only predators. An animal so peaceable that it would go to any length to avoid predation. I was pretty sure I just wanted to see one.

I asked my friends Tim and Sean, both hunting guides, where they would go if they wanted to find a goat that had not been corrupted. They said I would have to go as far back as I could—shocker—and Sean gave me the name of a peak where, while skiing, he had seen goats on three occasions. “Bring your rappelling ropes,” he said.

Again I left long before daylight and hiked a long way, in the rain of mid November—sleet, up high, and fog, toward a peak where I'd never been before, but which on the map showed itself to be a great pyramidal point overlooking a broad hanging valley. I would hump up a long steep ridge to one of its lower ridges and follow the fin of that ridge to the flank of the pyramid, and then, in the talus, I would begin to look for goats, circumnavigating the peak like a pilgrim come to one of the world's holy places. It would be a 16-hour day.

The trail disappeared and the rain intensified; fog shrouded the mountains, and I had brought no compass. I consulted my rain-tattered topo map often and did my wandering best, mindful if I got off on a spur ridge or dropped into another basin, I could

end up in Idaho, a day or more away.

I was still in thick forest, walking that knife edge, and as I slogged, I held out the hope that in such miserable weather the goats might also have come down off those highest cliffs and spires, and be taking refuge in these same dripping woods. I squinted into the fog and at the faintest suggestion of the valley below, and the parallel ridge across from me—the one that also led to the peak—and though I walked all day, I seemed to be getting no closer. I was in new country but was unable to see it.

I was tempted to bushwhack down into the valley and seek the most direct route to the peak; but I stayed with my map, went the long way around, and did not reach the country I sought.

My flashlight was weak, and I lost the ridge often. I was wet and shivering, and if I'd wandered off the trail, I would've been in a bad spot. I stumbled and fell hard against some rocks at one point—I heard and felt a crack in my left forearm, which I'd used to cradle my rifle during the fall. It hurt, but so unpleasant were the general conditions that I didn't differentiate that pain from any other.

I got out around midnight. I had gone into new country but had seen almost none of it. *That's O.K.*, I told myself. I was building goat karma. It takes years to learn to hunt, and many of those years must first be spent learning how not to hunt.

### → PUSHING THROUGH PAIN

I thought it was a bruise. My forearm swelled and hurt, but it was November, so I kept hunting. Chasing elk. Later in the season—the last week—I would be

IT'S WRONG  
TO KILL  
SOMETHING  
YOU DON'T  
KNOW. IT'S  
HARD  
ENOUGH  
TO KILL  
SOMETHING  
YOU DO  
KNOW.

CONTINUED ON P. 102

### My Trophy

#### DAD'S CANS

I've carried them from my childhood home to my college dorm room, to the duplex I rented after graduation, to my first home and my second and now my third. They don't take up much space.

We parked by the side of a dirt road and scrounged up two cans from the ditch. Daddy shot first: His blast obliterated the Pepsi can, leaving the top and bottom barely connected by a metal strip that would fail, despite my years of efforts to keep it together. I went

next. It was the first time I'd ever pulled a trigger, and I almost missed the Budweiser can: Three pellet holes pocked the bottom half. We left the woods—but not without the targets.

That was the only shot I would ever share with my father, our only time afield with a gun. He died a few months later, unexpectedly. He never got the chance to buy me a gun. Instead, I carry our cans from place to place—for 41 years now—like the embers from a fire.

—T. Edward Nickens





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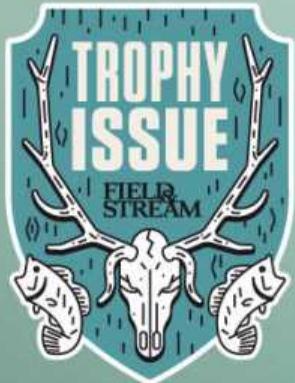


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# PRETTY BOYS

FOR THESE PRIZED DUCKS, THE REWARD IS THE ADVENTURE, WHICH MAY TAKE YOU ANYWHERE  
FROM MEXICO TO THE BERING SEA. AND THEY MAKE FOR SOME AWESOME MOUNTS, TOO

BY *Phil Bourjaily* ♦ PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Dan Saelinger*



Fowl Royalty  
A king eider is  
a bucket-list  
bird for many  
waterfowlers.



**Matching Pair**  
A set of harlequins creates a gorgeous, and rare, mount.



*✗ A drake mallard is a trophy that can be found just about everywhere. But the most sought-after species among diehard duck hunters are more rare, more specialized, and more challenging to kill. Enduring the bitter late season is often required just to see one of these birds in full plumage. All of these species are revered for their striking beauty, but the journeys required to find them—from southern sheet water to the Alaskan surf—are as much a part of the trophy as the ducks themselves.*

#### THE SUPER SPRIG



#### NORTHERN PINTAIL

**Estimated 2015**  
**Population:** 3 million

**Preferred Habitat:**  
Ricefields and other open, shallow habitat

→ Pintail numbers are down slightly this year, and the breeding population is 24 percent below the long-term average. Still, they're an abundant duck within their favored wintering grounds during the season. California hunters even complain about their two-bird limit because there are days when pintails are all they see. California and Texas are the top pintail states, in large part because both grow lots of rice. Pintails love rice, and the open water of a flooded field suits their wary nature.

Trill sparingly on a whistle, hide well, and be ready to take a long shot when pintails are stand-offish. They are cautious ducks, prone to circling high and descending slowly. They work best on sunny days and turn skittish when it's cloudy. While pintails love flooded ricefields, you might shoot a bull sprig in an open hole on one of the tule marshes in California's refuge system, or in a dry field over a snow goose spread in Texas.

#### THE COASTAL CLOWN



#### HARLEQUIN

**Estimated 2015**  
**Population:** 110,000 (Atlantic); up to 1 million (Pacific)

**Preferred Habitat:**  
Rocky surf

→ A slate blue, russet, and white harlequin drake is stunning. Divided into two separate populations, Atlantic and Pacific, harlequins migrate laterally, breeding inland on fast, rocky woodland streams, then migrating to winter on the coast.

Harlequin numbers are stable, and increasing slightly. Still, harvest is tightly controlled. Washington allows hunters one bird per year; Alaska, four. Alaska's harvest of 2,200 birds is the highest in the nation.

A harlequin hunt is a day at the beach—literally. The ducks feed off pebbled shores where they dive for crabs and fish. Toss out a dozen decoys, hide among the shoreline rocks, or in some cases just take a low seat on the beach, as harlequins are not particularly wary ducks. Take turns with your hunting partners spotting with binoculars and shooting to be sure that you target mature drakes.

## THE SOUTHERN DRAW



## BLUEWING TEAL

## Estimated 2015

Population: 8.55 million

## Preferred Habitat:

Mudflats and shallow, open backwaters

→ Early migrants, bluewings are through and gone from most places long before they reach full plumage. Few hunters, save for those in the deep South, ever see a drake in nuptial wear. This year's population is the third highest ever, and Texas and Louisiana lead the way in annual bluewing harvest. The southern reaches of those states, and Lake Okeechobee in Florida, are the top spots unless you want to hunt Mexico or Nicaragua.

Bluewings dabble in shallow water and mudflats, and they respond well to spinning-wing decoys. Although teal decoys are available, bluewings work readily to any blocks. Some hunters prefer to set mallard decoys due to their larger profile, which ducks can see better from a distance. You can make the shrill high-balls of a bluewing hen on a teal call or on a regular mallard call, or you can replicate the sound with your natural voice—a technique old-timers call "laughing them in."

## THE NORTHERN GHOST



## BLACK DUCK

## Estimated 2015

Population: 541,000

## Preferred Habitat:

Salt marsh, beaver ponds, and other secluded, swampy habitat

→ A duck of the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, the black duck is most often associated with the salt marshes of the eastern seaboard. Its numbers have declined since the 1950s due to habitat loss and hybridization with aggressive mallards. The limit stands at one bird a day. Up to 70 percent of the Atlantic Flyway population winters in Delaware Bay, but New York typically has the highest harvest. Hunters took 16,271 black ducks in New York in 2014.

Famously wary—waterfowlers used to swear black ducks could smell hunters—these birds work best to small spreads. Put six mallards in one group and two to four black duck decoys a short distance away. Black ducks may work a spread alongside a flock of mallards, but you may have to let the mallards land to get your chance at a trophy. The drakes and hens look similar. Pick out the drake's darker head and yellow bill.

## THE ARCTIC GEM



## KING EIDER

## Estimated 2015

Population: 375,000

## Preferred Habitat:

Open sea

→ Winter on the Bering Sea will test the toughest hunter, but the potential reward is one of waterfowling's rarest trophies—the king eider. These large sea ducks breed above the Arctic Circle and migrate to Alaska and the east coasts of Canada and the U.S. They are hunted primarily off the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutians, where the limit stands at four a year. The king eider's remote range makes the species difficult to count, but a 1990s survey estimated a fluctuating population of around 375,000, with a near 50 percent decline since the 1970s.

A king eider hunt may take you up to a mile offshore where you'll hunt over a longline of decoys and use a black flag to lure birds close. Spend the extra money and shoot 3- or 3½-inch Hevi-Shot 4s, and be ready to hit birds again on the water if they show signs of life. King eiders are tough birds that can dive to 100 feet, making clean kills imperative.

## THE TASTY BULL



## CANVASBACK

## Estimated 2015

Population: 750,000

## Preferred Habitat:

Open water with abundant aquatic vegetation

→ Prized by chefs in the days of market hunting, a canvasback is a trophy duck today. It is no longer an abundant species, but the population, according to the most recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife survey, is 30 percent above the long-term average. Federal guidelines allow a limit of two canvasbacks per hunter, per day, in every flyway in 2015.

The can's reputation as the finest tasting of ducks rests on its fondness for eating wild celery, but they feed on a variety of aquatic plants. Chesapeake Bay and the Upper Mississippi River are steeped in canvasback hunting tradition, but hunters in Louisiana, Texas, and California shoot more birds. As with most diver hunting, a big spread on open water pulls in cans. Most hunters rig 100-plus decoys on longlines, and many rig drakes only, as their white bodies are more visible. Some Midwesterners increase visibility further by adding a pair of trumpeter swan decoys.

## My Trophy

## AN IRISH PICK-ME-UP

It was a terrible shoot for woodcock, 30 years ago in the west of Ireland, a day of walking the stony slopes and along the rock walls, the Lab refusing to go into the gorse to flush the birds, and all the while the gillie, Michael, howling: "Frisky! Hie cock! Get up here, Frisky!" One bird did get up, throwing me a glance as it jetted past; and all I could do was turn and trip, and land in the long grass as the bird vanished into the air.

As afternoons end so often in Ireland, I sat on a stool in Joe O'Grady's in Tubber with another gillie, Jack, who talked about the fine hunts there'd been in the past. Then a thought—and Jack was up and out of the pub. He returned minutes later with a varnished stick in his hand. "This is for you, sir," he said. "A fine blackthorn for beating the bushes on your next try at woodcocking." He put it in my hands. "I wasn't sure I had another," he said. "But when I nipped over to my house and saw that I did, me heart lifted." Mine lifted, too.

—Thomas McIntyre

F&S

# LETTING GO

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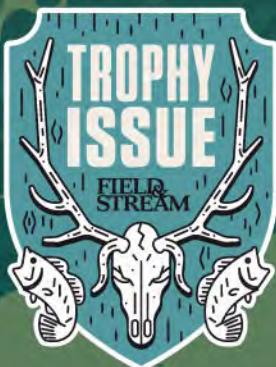
ONE ANGLER'S LIFE-CHANGING DECISION

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BY JIMMY FEE

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM McDONAGH





# S

→ **STRIPED BASS DON'T** often hit a slow-moving needlefish plug very hard. The strike feels more like the soft tap of a panfish rather than an attack from one of the Northeast's most powerful gamefish. So as the gentle July Cape Cod surf swept my needle over the sandbar in front of me into a deeper cut, I could have easily missed the bump that came just before 3 A.M. Luckily I didn't, because it had been made by the bass I'd been hunting for a decade and a half.

## ✗ UNDER MY SKIN

That hunt began on the Third Street jetty in Ocean City, N.J., on Dec. 8, 1999, when I was 15 years old. I had my hands

tucked into my neoprene waders to guard against the early winter cold, watching my surf rod pulse in its sand spike, when it suddenly snapped straight, pointing right at the steely-gray sky for a second before bowing over. My heart was beating out of my chest. That stripers only weighed 11 pounds, but it was my first, and the spark that lit my fire for the species.

Several years later, my parents gave me a painting of that jetty as a birthday gift. It hung in my room for a long time until I bought a house of my own in Massachusetts and put it above the mantel. While I've always loved the painting, I really considered it a placeholder for the decoration my house lacked—the mount of a surf-caught 50-pound striped bass.

I don't know exactly when 50 pounds became the mark for stripers fishermen. Some anglers trace it back to the 1950s, when Rhode Island-based Ashaway Line Co. offered a reward for stripers of 50 pounds or more caught on its product, and called it the Nifty Fifty Club. But I do know why it became the magic number. Fifty-pounders are rare but not unattainable. Every year a few dozen hit the scales at tackle shops from Virginia to Massachusetts, and a couple dozen more are caught and released with no fanfare. But thousands of dedicated stripers fishermen go their whole lives without ever catching one.

Though I've released almost every striped bass I've ever caught, I planned on having my 50 skin-mounted. A striped bass of that size would be more than 20 years old, and nothing survives that long in the ocean without a dam-



aged fin or tail, a scar on its flank, or a wound from a previous encounter with a hook. A fiberglass replica would never capture those details.

## ✗ SHAKEN

I first saw taxidermist Paul DeAngelo's work at a fishing expo. The stripers on display still looked wet with saltwater, the scales subtly glinting with purples and greens. Ever since then, I knew he was my guy regardless of price; getting him my 50 would require covering the fish in borax and shipping it express to his studio in Washington state. After I swung on that light hit, the needlefish's hooks dug in, and my 11-foot rod bent to the grip. That's when I wondered for the first time if the fish on the other end might be the one to

## MISSING TEETH

I tend to lose things. So, besides antlers, I rarely keep tokens from hunts, even when I try. Often, I forget to try.

When I killed my first and only bull elk with a bow—the most exhilarating hunt of my life—it never even crossed my mind to keep the prized canine teeth, the ivories. But the next day at camp I noticed that I didn't have my knife. There was

only one place it could be: the gut pile. I really liked that knife, but not enough to huff back up and down the mountain. Then I couldn't find my glasses. The knife was lying between the stomach and the liver. My glasses were right where I'd put them, pushed down over the nose of the bull's de-antlered head—not as a joke but so they'd be too conspicuous to forget. When I

reached to grab them, I noticed the earpiece was pointing at the bull's teeth. I cut around the gums with the blade, and bashed the ivories out with the butt of the handle.

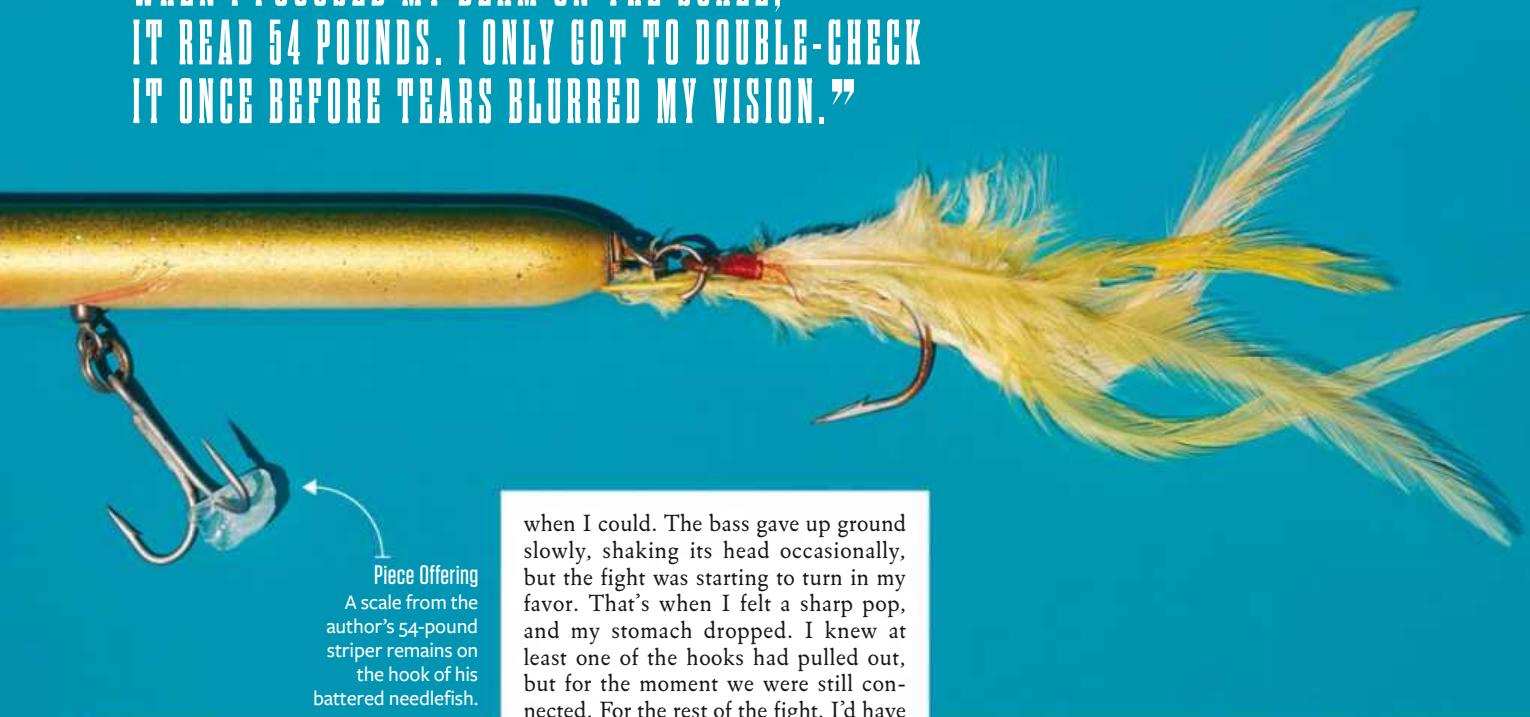
That was four years ago, and somehow I still have the ivories. Must be they just mean more to me than other stuff. After all, I no longer have the knife or the glasses.

—Dave Hurteau

## My Trophy



“WHEN I FOCUSED MY BEAM ON THE SCALE, IT READ 54 POUNDS. I ONLY GOT TO DOUBLE-CHECK IT ONCE BEFORE TEARS BLURRED MY VISION.”



make that cross-country journey.

When the bass began to shake its head out there in the darkness, the rod lifted and dropped violently. All I could do was hold on and hope the set was good. Once the fish settled down, it turned and began to swim down the beach with the current, peeling drag in an unbroken stream. The first run wasn't very long, but when the stripers stopped, I couldn't move it. The braid began to whine in the onshore breeze as we sat locked in a stalemate.

Several years before, I'd had a similar take on a needlefish followed by big headshakes and a long, blistering run. Despite my being on a sandy beach with no obstructions to cut my line, panic had overridden reason, and I had twisted the drag knob clockwise. The fish had slowed momentarily before the line went slack, and I'd reeled in the plug and its two twisted treble hooks. This time I was confident in my drag setting, but when the fish began a second, faster run, I was tempted to tighten the knob.

Determined to remain calm, I held the rod high until the fish stopped and turned. At that point, keeping the line tight became my top priority. I pumped the rod, reeling quickly to store line

when I could. The bass gave up ground slowly, shaking its head occasionally, but the fight was starting to turn in my favor. That's when I felt a sharp pop, and my stomach dropped. I knew at least one of the hooks had pulled out, but for the moment we were still connected. For the rest of the fight, I'd have to be careful not to put too much strain on the hooks that were still planted. Every time the fish changed direction, I felt like I was going to throw up.

## ✖ AGAINST THE WALL

It may sound crazy, but I didn't want to catch just any 50-pounder. It had to be the *right* 50. I always dreamed that I'd hook it while fishing alone, not on a crowded beach in the middle of a blitz. I wanted it to come from an area I decided to fish based on my own experience or a gut feeling, not following another angler's lead or chasing a report. When I finally worked the stripers into knee-deep water, I realized all my criteria were met. Even in the dark I could tell the bass was more than 4 feet long. At its widest point, it was as big around as a basketball. I could fit my whole hand, fingers splayed, inside its open mouth without touching the sides.

When I flicked on my neck light, I saw that the plug's thick tail hook had started to bend open but still held in the top of the fish's mouth. One prong of the belly treble had snapped off—the pop I'd felt during the fight—while another sported a single stripers scale. I clipped my Boga Grip to the fish's lower jaw and strained to lift it clear of

the water. When I focused my beam on the Boga's scale, it read 54 pounds. I only got to double-check it once before tears blurred my vision. Part of it was euphoria, and the other part was sadness that a 15-year search full of hundreds of sleepless nights across five states had reached its end.

The fish would look fantastic above my mantel—huge mouth agape, gills flared—but as it thrashed in the shallow water, I knew I couldn't do it. I couldn't drag that stripers onto dry land and let it die. Instead, I unhooked the bass, grabbed its lower jaw, and waded it back into the surf. After almost a minute of my gently rocking it back and forth, it began to kick its tail, slowly at first, then violently as it tried to free itself from my grip. I held on a few seconds longer than I needed to. When I finally let go, the fish hung motionless for a moment, and then, in two powerful beats of its massive broom tail, it disappeared from the beam of my flashlight.

The painting of the Third Street jetty in Ocean City, N.J., still hangs over my mantel as a reminder of the first stripers I ever caught. And now, directly below it, sits a needlefish with bent and broken hooks—one piercing a quarter-size stripers scale—that reminds me of the one I may never catch again.

# There is something **TERRIBLY WRONG** with the Home Security Industry

**Hi.** Maybe you've been broken into before, or maybe you haven't. But if you ever decide to protect your home against unfortunate events like that, you're in for a shock. We don't want to scare you off of protecting your home, because honestly, it's really important that you do it. But we feel responsible for sharing these facts with you: Most alarm companies take advantage of people who want to feel safe. They offer you a "free" outdated alarm, but then require you to sign a long-term contract full of nasty fine print. It's pretty sickening really...but this isn't going to be all bad news. There is a better way to protect your home—get a SimpliSafe home security system. Our founder, a Harvard engineer, studied the alarm industry and found all kinds of problems with it. He designed SimpliSafe to fix them, so you can be safe, without having to spend a fortune or sign any contracts. SimpliSafe is wireless, you can order it online, and it's easy to install yourself—anyone can do it. It fits any home, apartment, or business. And it's more affordable, more reliable, and stronger than just about anything else out there.

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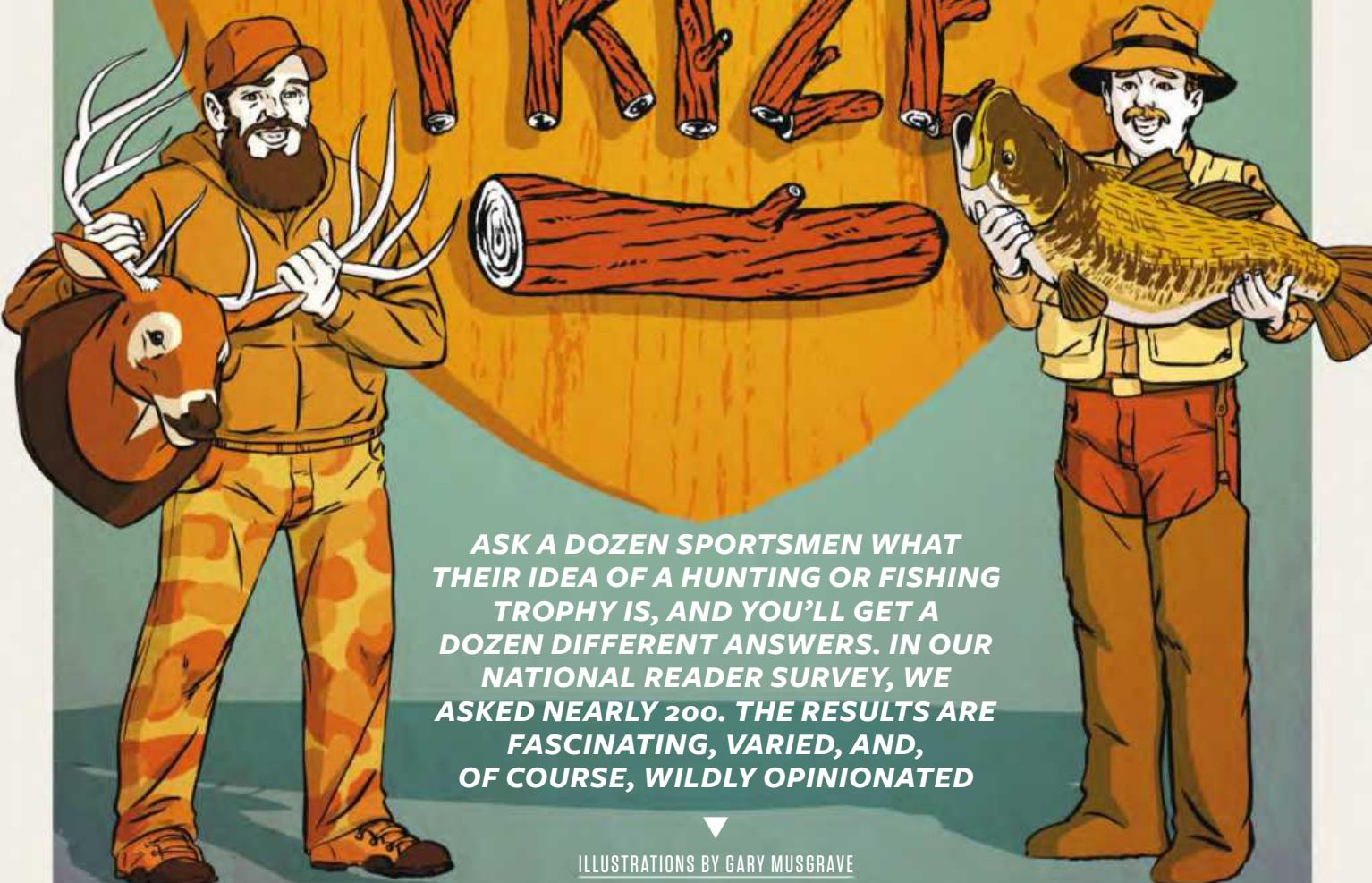


**"Protecting your family is important, but don't ever sign a contract. Do it the right way with SimpliSafe."**

—Dave Ramsey, financial expert & New York  
Times bestselling author

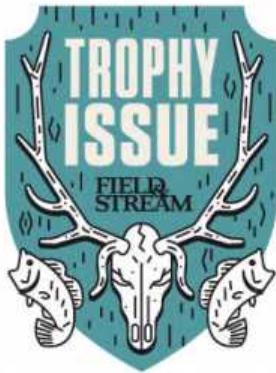


# NAME YOUR PRIZE



ASK A DOZEN SPORTSMEN WHAT  
THEIR IDEA OF A HUNTING OR FISHING  
TROPHY IS, AND YOU'LL GET A  
DOZEN DIFFERENT ANSWERS. IN OUR  
NATIONAL READER SURVEY, WE  
ASKED NEARLY 200. THE RESULTS ARE  
FASCINATING, VARIED, AND,  
OF COURSE, WILDLY OPINIONATED

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY MUSGRAVE



Hunting and fishing trophies are a little like fantasy football teams: It's much more fun to talk about your own than it is to listen to others go on and on about theirs. That's part of the reason we conducted this reader trophy survey—to give you all a chance to share your stories. But more than that, we were genuinely curious as to where you stand on trophy hunting and fishing, and what your idea of a trophy really is. Another mount for your home? A freezer full of meat? Or simply the time spent outside? All we can say is we're glad we asked, because your answers were thoughtful and, in some cases, surprising. See for yourself.

**WHICH OF THESE TROPHIES WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO CATCH?**

- A. 24-inch wild brown trout 26%
- B. 10-pound largemouth 23%
- C. 50-inch muskie 14%
- D. 7-pound smallmouth 10%
- E. 20-pound steelhead 7%
- F. 50-pound striped bass 4%
- G. Other 17%

Write-in answers:  
30-inch walleye,  
40-inch pike, 40-  
pound king salmon,  
50-pound carp,  
any blue marlin



**F & S READER SURVEY**

**Do you consider yourself a trophy hunter?**

- A. No 67%
- B. Yes 33%

"Yes, I am. Because every animal harvested is a trophy." —DANIEL MERCK

"For me, the experience is the trophy. The harvest is just icing on top." —HARRISON BASHAM

"I eat meat. Horns are no good. I don't care how you cook them." —DUSTIN HESS

"I hunt to hunt. I won't pass on a trophy, but it's not my reason for hunting." —TERRY JOHNSON

"I am a new hunter, and my priorities are improving my skills, filling the freezer, and introducing new people to go hunting with me." —SHAWN MCCARDELL

**You kill a big gobbler. If you had the choice between keeping the beard for a trophy or the drumsticks for eating, which would you choose?**

- A. "I'm a leg man." 67%



- B. "The beard, man!" 33%

**Would you ever go trophy hunting in Africa?**

- A. "I'd rather spend my money on a different adventure." 66%
- B. "I'd love to, but probably never will." 31%
- C. "Yes. I'm saving up for a safari." 3%



**“SURE,  
AT FIRST I WAS A LITTLE TAKEN ABACK  
BY THE WHOLE PEEING STANDING UP THING.  
BUT I TAUGHT HIM TO THROW A STICK  
AND NOW HANGING OUT WITH HIM  
IS THE BEST PART OF MY DAY.”**

**—EINSTEIN  
adopted 12-09-10**

A PERSON  
IS THE BEST  
THING TO HAPPEN  
TO A SHELTER PET



**adopt**

[the shelterpetproject.org](http://theshelterpetproject.org)





*I want  
to be  
a bench.  
Recycle me!*



IWantToBeRecycled.org



KEEP AMERICA  
BEAUTIFUL

**Which is the more impressive trophy?**Catching a 4-pound bass in a 100-acre lake **59%**Catching a 7-pound bass in a 1-acre pond **41%****What's the most money you've ever spent on one mounted trophy?**

Never had one done... I just keep the antlers... A couple bucks to print and frame the photo... \$600 for a bear rug... \$650 for a 10-pound bass... \$700 on my son's first deer... \$800 for a deer... \$4,500 on a full-body baboon...

**When blood-trailing a trophy animal, what are you most interested in recovering?****A. The meat** **84%****B. The head** **16%****Agree or disagree?****Catching a trout on a fly you tied makes the fish more of a trophy.****A. Agree** **96%****B. Disagree** **4%****What do you love most about trophy hunting?**

“The chase. Sometimes once the hunt is over, and the excitement has died down, I’m almost in remorse that my tag is filled.”

—ANDY O’DELL

“The challenge. The work. The harvest. The story.”

—BRIAN BUTCHER

“The money it puts into conservation.”

—PATRICK HORNEY

“The satisfaction of putting in the work, and the patience to pull it off. These animals don’t become trophies by being easy game.”

—JOSH HILEMAN

**TO ME, A TROPHY TURKEY IS:**

- A. A gobbler with long spurs and a swinging beard.** **52%**
- B. Any legal bird in range, period.** **31%**
- C. Any bird that comes in gobbling and strutting. If it happens to be a jake, so be it.** **17%**

“A trophy gives me a reason to hunt longer. I also love big racks on the wall.” —KYLE ALMELING

**When it comes to a fish qualifying as a trophy, what's the most important determining factor?**

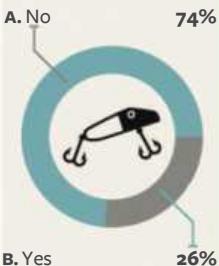
- A. Size (length and/or weight)** **46%**
- B. How you caught it** **29%**
- C. Who was fishing**

**with you** **15%****D. A healthy release** **7%****E. How it tastes** **2%****Are you more likely to release a true trophy fish, or less?**

- A. More** **70%**
- B. Less** **30%**

**Which is the better whitetail trophy?****A. A 10-pointer with a****bunch of kickers and stickers** **63%****B. A clean typical 10-pointer** **37%****Which of these duck trophies most appeals to you?**

- A. A band** **47%**
- B. A rice-fed mallard with a thick layer of fat** **30%**
- C. A long bull-pintail sprig** **12%**
- D. Other** **13%**

**Have you ever retired a lure or fly after it caught a fish you considered a trophy?**

“I retired a green pumpkin Zoom magnum lizard that I caught my personal best largemouth bass on. My soon-to-be wife doesn’t know it yet, but I’m going to frame the lure and hang it on our living-room wall.”

—PATRICK FINUCANE

“My grandfather’s red-and-white Dardevle. I was given the lure after he passed away, and on a trip to Canada, I caught my biggest northern pike ever with it.” —BEN ANDERSON

**Describe your dream trophy fishing adventure.**

“Catching a record largemouth at a location not commonly known as a bass haven.”

—MARK FOLSOM

“New Zealand with my husband for Tasmanian trout.” —LINDA KUERSTEN

“I’d go anywhere to catch

**My Trophy****OUT WITH A BAND**

My dented goose band is like one of those Civil War Bibles with a bullet lodged in it, except that the band didn’t save the life of its wearer. According to the FWS certificate I received when I reported the number, the goose was “too young to fly when banded” in southern Minnesota in 2011, and it wore the band until I shot it in Jan. 2015.

I’d always wanted a pellet-marked band as a novelty, but when I look at this one, with its round divot making

a period that marks the end of the bird’s life, I think about the goose’s journeys and how I ended them.

It was the last day of the season, cold and windy enough to tip decoys. Between flights, my young hunting partners and I ran through the decoys to stay warm. The end of the hunt brought us four limits of Canadas and the dented band—as perfect an end to the season as I could hope for, but the end, nevertheless.

—Phil Bourjaily



anything, as long as I'm with my boys."

—JEFF KREAGER

"Bluegills with my daughter on our farm pond."

—JOSHUA JENKINS

#### Which of these duck species would you most like to kill?

- A. Pintail 25%
- B. Canvasback 17%
- C. Cinnamon teal 16%
- D. Harlequin 9%
- E. Black duck 7%
- F. King eider 3%
- G. Other 23%

Write-in answers: Wood duck, bluewing teal in full plumage

#### When you walk into a room practically covered in taxidermy, you think:

- A. "Buddy, I dig your style." 90%
- B. "There's gotta be meth houses with more style than this." 10%

#### Hypothetically, which trophy buck would you remember most?

- A. "The basket-racked 6-pointer I killed on public land. I hiked a mile

from the truck with a climber on my back to get him."

48%

B. "The 10-pointer that I shot in the food plot I planted on my farm. I worked all summer to make my farm better, and I must have had a thousand trail-camera photos of him."

46%

C. "The Booner I killed on an outfitted Saskatchewan hunt. I saved for two years to take that trip, and sat for five days in a cold blind before I shot him."

6%

#### When deciding if a buck is a trophy, you're thinking mostly about:

- A. The experience 49%
- B. Antler score 22%
- C. Age 21%
- D. Body size 8%

#### Describe your dream trophy hunting adventure.

"Brown bears with a bow in Alaska. I'd bring my daughter."

—GREG STANTON

"I've never hunted elk, and my dad has tried unsuccessfully. A dream of mine would be to go on an elk hunt with him and for him to shoot a trophy bull. I



#### WHO DECIDES WHERE YOUR MOUNTS GO IN THE HOUSE?

- A. "It's a joint decision." 53%
- B. "Yours truly." 36%
- C. "My better half." 11%

think any bull would be a trophy in our eyes."

—JEREMIAH FELTZ

"I'd take my two sons to Alaska for king eiders."

—MIKE SUNDSTROM

"A bighorn sheep hunt, packed in on horses, anywhere from New Mexico to Alaska with my son and son-in-law."

—JAMES SMITH

"My place, my son, turkeys."

—JOEL PARKER

#### If you could have one full-body mount in your house, what would you pick?

- A. Grizzly bear 38%
- B. A huge whitetail or muley 24%
- C. A sheep or goat 14%

- D. Musk ox 2%
- E. Other 23%

#### Which whitetail mount would get a more prominent display in your house?

- A. A 140-inch buck killed with a bow 67%



- B. A Booner killed with a gun 33%

#### Which animal makes the coolest skull mount?

- A. Whitetail deer 26%

- B. Elk 22%
- C. Bighorn ram 17%

- D. Bear 15%
- E. Pronghorn 5%

- F. Mule deer 4%
- G. Other 11%

Write-in answers: Kudu, moose, wild boar, coyote

#### What style of fish trophy is more desirable?

- A. A great photo 56%
- B. Replica mount 28%
- C. Skin mount 16%

#### When you hear the phrase trophy hunting, what comes to mind?

Horns... Racks... Antlers... Monster whitetails... Fenced hunts... Guided hunts... Skill... Arrogance... Quality management... Some jackass on TV... Consumerism... Conservation... Elk... Adventure... Lame-stream media... Misunderstanding... Badass... Snobs... Savage... Africa... Alaska... Patience, self-control, and hard work... The most majestic animal you've ever seen... Egos... Confusion—straight-up confusion...

#### My Trophy

##### THE TRAVELING TRUNK

I dove into bowhunting as a teenager, on a patch of Iowa public land pounded by hunters. Just seeing a deer was a victory; getting a shot seemed an over-the-moon proposition. All that changed on a November morning when I emptied my quiver at an 8-pointer. My first three arrows went behind, above, and under the buck. With one arrow left, I focused on the buck's rib cage. I never noticed the river birch just behind his shoulder. The impact sounded like a rifle shot when

my arrow dead-centered that tree.

Moments of clarity rarely visit 16-year-olds, but I had one that morning. I sawed off the trunk section containing my broadhead and carried it out. The totem has been on display in every place I've lived since. It reminds me of a boy with many paths—some of them bad, all of them confusing—ahead of him. But the thrill of that hunt convinced him that, no matter what, he would always be a bowhunter.

—Scott Bestul

**We are stewards.**

Our mornings, our nights and the waking hours in between —

this is when we discover what we can achieve.

We are determined to grow and build and cultivate

the life of our dreams. Because this is our ground.

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**For Earth, For Life**  
**Kubota**

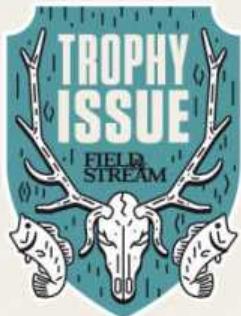


fig. 1 CUTTHROAT TROUT



fig. 2 BROWN TROUT

# SKIN DEEP

Our fishing editor shares the story behind his obsessive and quirky collection of used, beat-up mounts

By JOE CERMELE

Photographs  
by RALPH SMITH



fig. 3 HYBRID STRIPED BASS

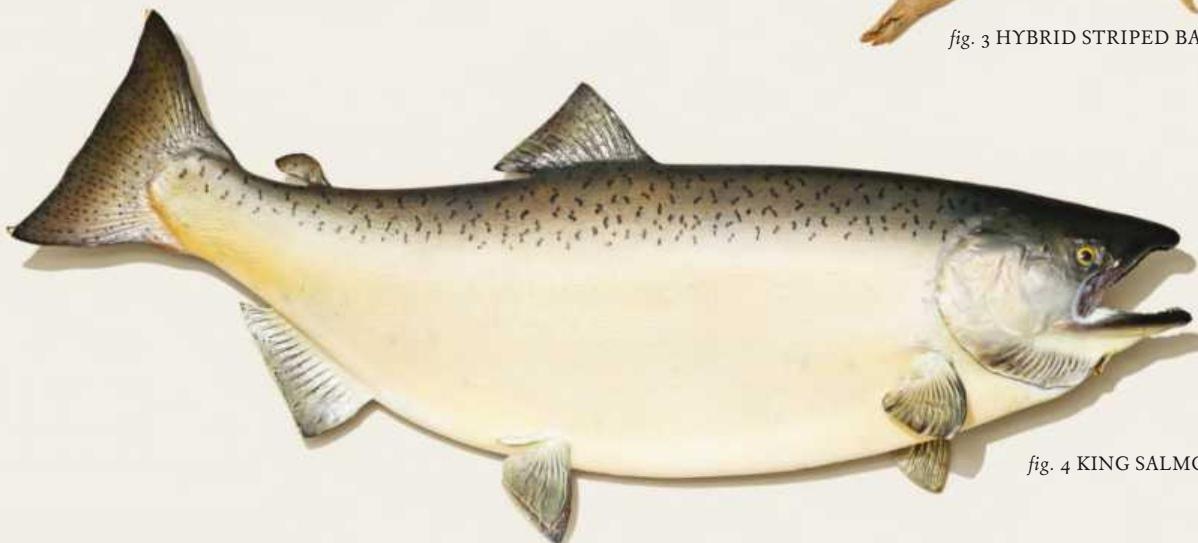


fig. 4 KING SALMON

## THE FIRST SKIN MOUNT I EVER

bought was a dusty 22-inch brown trout hanging in the corner of an antiques store in Columbus, N.J. The shop owner told me the fish was caught near Punxsutawney, Pa., but that's all he knew. What I knew was that whoever hooked this trout must have been extremely proud of the catch and felt a strong connection to the fish. I knew this

because I felt the same thing when I picked up the first fish I ever had mounted. As far as I was concerned, this forgotten brown trout deserved to be on the wall of an angler who still appreciated its meaning. So for fear of its ending up next to a neon Stella sign in a hipster bar, I pulled out my wallet and came to its rescue.

The problem with mounted fish—whether bought or caught—is that like tattoos, once you get one, you want more. In the years that followed

the dusty brown trout, I picked up a pickerel at this shop, a mahimahi at that store, and a smallmouth at some flea market. Condition wasn't important. In fact, the more weathered and flawed, the more I liked them. It's the missing fin and amateur paint job that give a mount character—and, in a way, deepen the mystery of the mount's origin and life before it ended up in my care.

My only criteria are price and material. I never buy replicas,

only skin, and the most I'd ever pay for a very rare or unique mount is \$100. (To any antiques-store owners reading this: It's an old fish that'll keep getting uglier with age, not a Tiffany lamp. Get real with your prices.) I also don't shop for them online, because that's too easy. The fun is in the quest—that moment when you scan the walls of an antiques shack off the beaten path and find a grizzled largemouth staring back.

To date, there are 14 skin



fig. 5 MAHIMAHİ

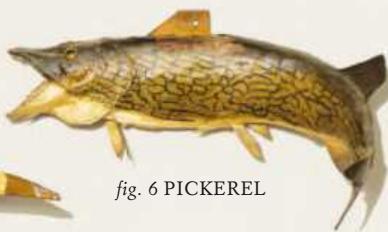


fig. 6 PICKEREL



fig. 7 PALOMINO TROUT



fig. 8 WHITE BASS



fig. 9 SMALLMOUTH BASS



fig. 10 BROWN TROUT



fig. 11 BLUEFISH



fig. 12 RAINBOW TROUT



fig. 13 BONEFISH

mounts in my collection, the most prized of which are a 10-pound bonefish and a 20-inch palomino trout. Based on the bone's aqua paint job and heavy plaster core, and the fact that it's no longer PC to kill a gray ghost, I figure the mount is from the '50s or '60s, and I know I'll probably never find another like it. The palomino, while being one of the worst mount jobs I've ever seen, was a must-have for a guy who grew up in Jersey where the "golden trout" was



fig. 14 LARGEMOUTH BASS

such a coveted opening-day prize. If you're not from the Northeast, you may not understand. Every time I see that gaudy orange fish hanging in the garage with the others, I wonder if the person who caught it was

the lucky one standing around a hole with 20 other fishermen, bombarding the poor glowing trout with corn, worms, and spinners. I think about whether photos of Ed Hogan holding his 50-pound king salmon on

June 16, 1984, still exist, or if the name and date that are scribbled on his mount (now hanging over my lawn mower) are the only remaining record of the feat. And I wonder how long the stories behind the mounts of fish I've caught will get passed on through my family before they become hazy or disappear altogether, to leave future owners guessing.

Just to be safe, I think I'll pen all their stories and slip a copy in with my will.



# FEAST YOUR EYES

A STRONG ARGUMENT CAN BE MADE THAT THE ULTIMATE TROPHY IS THE GAME AND FISH YOU BRING HOME FOR DINNER. HERE ARE RECIPES AND TIPS TO HELP YOU COOK THAT MEAT IN WAYS THAT TASTE DELICIOUS AND LOOK STUNNING

BY DAVID DRAPER  
AND COLIN KEARNS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
CHRISTOPHER TESTANI

ERIC HENTZ (TYPOGRAPHY)





## ◀ LEG OF VENISON ON A STRING

I have a hook set beneath my fireplace mantel for the sole purpose of cooking meat this way. The venison is suspended by heavy string from the hook, and the leg spins slowly while it cooks. Every time you walk past, give it a gentle twirl so the venison spins in front of the fire. Here's the cool thing about this method: The venison will spin until the string has unwound and then, due to the meat's weight, it will keep spinning in the opposite direction, and so on. People get a kick out of watching how long the leg will spin without a touch. When you butcher your deer, remove the pelvic bone but keep the leg intact, and scrape down the bone midway so you have a clean, sturdy section of bone on which to tie the string.

### INGREDIENTS

1 venison leg (6 to 12 lb.), trimmed of fat and silverskin  
3 cups water  
2/3 cup kosher salt

For the mint pesto:  
3 cups fresh mint  
1/2 cup packed flat-leaf parsley  
1 Tbsp. toasted pine nuts  
1/2 tsp. garlic, minced  
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
2 Tbsp. simple syrup  
Salt and pepper to taste

### DIRECTIONS

1. When the venison has been at room temperature for at least 2 hours, start a fire in your fireplace. Allow the fire to burn until the flames have died down and the glowing wood provides a steady, even heat.

2. Make the saltwater solution: Fill a medium saucepan with the water, add the kosher salt, and bring to a boil over high heat. Turn off the heat and allow the solution to cool. When it's cool, transfer it to a spray bottle.

3. Tie a 2-foot-long piece of butcher's twine securely around the bone at the end of the venison leg. Test it to make sure it will hold the leg's weight. Tie the other end of the twine to the fireplace hook so the venison is suspended and the bottom of the leg hangs about 8 to 12 inches above the fire. Place a large pan under

the venison to catch the drippings.

4. The leg will begin to spin; give the heel a twist in the direction in which it is turning. Every 10 minutes or so, check to see if the venison is turning. If it's not, give it a gentle push so it spins.

5. After about 15 minutes, begin to baste with the saltwater solution every 5 to 10 minutes, spraying the venison leg all the way around.

6. Feed the fire from both sides (but not from the front), pushing the wood to the center as it burns. As the meat cooks, don't add any more wood, but let the flames die down so the embers are cooking the venison.

7. After 90 minutes, begin basting the venison with the mint pesto (recipe below). Set aside half of the pesto as a condiment to serve with the finished venison.

8. The venison will roast for between 1 and 2 hours for a 6-pound leg and 2 1/2 hours for a 12-pound leg. Check for doneness by inserting an instant-read thermometer in the thickest part of the leg. For medium-rare meat, the temperature should be 130 degrees.

9. Transfer the venison to a sheet pan, cover lightly

with aluminum foil, and let it rest for at least 15 minutes.

10. Carve the leg. Spoon the carving juices over each slice and top with a generous portion of mint pesto. (If you have leftovers, the venison makes an incredible cold-cut sandwich.)

### Mint Pesto

1. Bring about 2 quarts of water to a boil in a stockpot over high heat. While the water heats, set up an ice bath in a large bowl full of ice and water. When the water is boiling, blanch the mint for about 30 seconds. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the mint to the ice bath.

2. Blanch the parsley for 30 seconds, then transfer it to the ice bath.

3. Remove the herbs from the cold water and squeeze them in a ball to remove the excess moisture. Roughly chop them.

4. In a large, heavy-duty blender or a food processor, blend the herbs, toasted pine nuts, and garlic, pulsing just until combined. With the machine running, drizzle the olive oil in slowly.

5. Pour in the simple syrup. Salt and pepper to taste.

Adapted from chef Michael Chiarello's recipe in *Wild Gourmet* ([boone-crockett.org](http://boone-crockett.org)).



My Trophy

### A LONG-LOST SIGNAL

This place where my family and I have been deer hunting for more than 80 years now, in the Texas Hill Country—the deer pasture—is where I learned to love hunting. I found this walkie-talkie back in the agarita and juniper many years ago. When I asked my dad about it, he said the walkie-talkie was a brief and goofy experiment my grandfather had used to stay in touch with folks back in camp. My father said he hadn't seen or thought about those walkie-talkies in what felt like a hundred years.

Things I don't know, looking at this old walkie-talkie, which, back in the day, must have been so cutting-edge as to make the latest iPhone seem like the arrowheads that coat these hills where we walk and hunt: What conversations passed through this machine and the air, unrecorded? Was it set down and forgotten? A glimpse of a wide-antlered buck, walking quickly through the brush—the hunter crouching, picking up his rifle, and following... Was my grandfather successful?

What he might have thought of as loss—not being able to find where this walkie-talkie was left—is my gain, in the remembering and the imagining, like some signal sent, back then, far into the future. I try now to wonder at those old conversations, in some ways as meaningless—weather, sports, I'm coming in for lunch in a few—as they are the wonderful fabric and matrix of our own brief days.

—Rick Bass



#### My Trophy

#### AFRICAN IRON

Africa, despite the dreadful encroachments of civilization, is still a place where you can encounter the odd and the unexplainable as easily as you can step in puku poop. I once saw a young man in some remote village, 200 miles from any electricity, pretending to play a perfectly carved copy of a Fender Telecaster guitar. Where did it come from? Who made it? How could he know about such a thing?

My own personal mystery is an arrowhead I noticed in 1987, sticking in a tree in the Luangwa River Valley in Zambia. It has a slender, leaf-shaped 4-inch blade and a 3-inch tang. It is a graceful thing, hand-forged from iron, and even today is pretty sharp.

That's what I know about the arrowhead. What I don't know, and will never know, is: Who shot it? How long? A month before I found it? A year? One hundred years? What was the hunter's name? What was he hunting? Did he curse his rotten aim? Did his empty stomach growl at him in reproach?

Iron is the most common of all the earth's elements, but this piece of it is special, as it contains the mystery of a continent. —David E. Petzal



## ← ROASTED WHOLE RED SNAPPER

Cooking a fish whole can seem intimidating. But the truth is, it's both the most forgiving and the most fulfilling way to cook your catch, and it's a dramatic dish to share with friends and family. Use a flat knife and fork to gently lift pieces of meat off the spine and serve.

—Justin Devillier

### INGREDIENTS

For the fish:

16-lb. whole red snapper, scaled and gutted  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the salsa verde:

1 bunch parsley, picked  
1 bunch cilantro, picked  
10 fresh basil leaves  
4 garlic cloves  
2 shallots, chopped  
1 cup red wine vinegar  
2 cups olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste

For the vegetables:

1 head napa cabbage  
1/2 cup canola oil, divided  
1 lb. shishito peppers  
3 shallots, minced  
4 garlic cloves, minced  
Lemon juice to taste  
Salt and pepper to taste

### DIRECTIONS

1. Make the salsa verde: Combine all of the ingredients, except the oil, in a blender. Blend until smooth, then drizzle the oil in slowly. Season with salt and pepper.

2. Cook the vegetables: Fire up your grill. Remove the bottom of the cabbage and separate the leaves. Drizzle with oil, salt, and pepper and place on the grill. Cook until

nicely charred and wilted, about 2 minutes if grill is hot enough. Remove to a serving dish. Heat the remaining oil in a large skillet. When the oil is shimmering, add the shishitos, tossing frequently. Cook for about 4 minutes. Once they are nicely browned and wilted, add the shallot and garlic and cook for 1 more minute, tossing frequently so as not to get color on these. Add the lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste. Place on top of the cabbage on the serving dish.

3. Cook the fish: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Check the fish completely for scales. Once all have been removed, score the fish diagonally, all the way to the backbone, on both sides. Brush the fish with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast the fish for 20 to 25 minutes, until the flesh around the neck is tender.
4. Place the fish over the cabbage and peppers on the serving dish, and top liberally with the salsa verde.

*Justin Devillier, an avid angler, is the award-winning chef and owner of La Petite Grocery and Balise in New Orleans.*



## DEEP-FRIED WILD TURKEY ↑

I love turkey hunting, and this is my go-to recipe. Most hunters remove the legs, but I find that they add to the richness of the dish. While deep-frying can be messy, it truly makes the best turkey meat I've ever tasted. The white meat is moist, the dark meat is flavorful, and the skin is crisp and beautifully browned.

—Pat LaFrieda

### INGREDIENTS

1 whole wild turkey (12 to 14 lb.), gutted  
1 cup packed light or dark brown sugar  
1 cup kosher salt  
3 gallons vegetable oil, or as needed

### DIRECTIONS

1. In a large stockpot, boil a gallon of water. Add the brown sugar and salt, then stir to dissolve them. Add 1 gallon of cold water and let the brine cool to room temperature. Immerse the turkey in the brine and refrigerate it for 24 hours or overnight. Remove the bird from the brine, rinse it off, and pat it dry.
2. Fill a turkey fryer halfway with oil and heat the oil

until it reaches 350 degrees. Gently lower the turkey into the oil and fry it for about 45 minutes, or until it reaches an internal temperature of 155 degrees (the temperature will rise to the USDA-recommended 165 degrees while the turkey rests). As the turkey cooks, do not let the oil get above 350 degrees. Remove the turkey from the fryer, tent it with foil, and let it rest for 20 to 30 minutes.

3. Carve the turkey, and enjoy with your favorite sides.

*Pat LaFrieda is the owner of Pat LaFrieda Meat Purveyors and the author of Meat: Everything You Need to Know. He lives—and hunts—in New Jersey.*

## HOW TO THROW A WILD-GAME PARTY



Hosting a game dinner is a big job, and with trophy-size cuts you'll need some help. Get your pals together and follow these tips.

**Plan Ahead** Weeks before the event, start a list of potential dishes.

And if you're going to serve something new, make at least two test batches before serving it to guests.

**Sample Size** Don't fill a platter with giant moose steaks. Instead, give guests a chance

to try everything with smaller servings.

**Mix It Up** Serve as many different types of game as possible. Not a waterfowler? Offer to exchange some deer steaks for a brace of plucked ducks.

### Only the Best

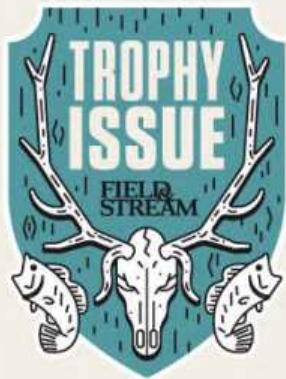
This isn't the time to clean out the deep freeze of all your old, freezer-burned meat. Impress your guests by sharing quality cuts. For example: That elk tenderloin you've been saving for a special oc-

casion? Now's the time to cook it.

### Spread the Word

Invite nonhunters, too. There's no better way to educate others about hunting than serving them delicious wild game.

—D.D.



# Fierce OBJECTS of DESIRE

WHILE THE QUARRY'S MAGNIFICENCE IS UNCHANGED, THE PUBLIC FACE OF THE TROPHY HUNTER HAS BEEN TRANSFIGURED, FROM HERO TO VILLAIN. YET DONE RIGHT, THERE'S STILL HONOR IN THE CHASE, AND THERE'S NO BETTER WAY TO CONSERVE BIG GAME

BY Thomas McIntyre

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Andrew B. Myers

THE GREATER PART OF A LIFETIME AGO, I walked softly for a mile through the darkness of the Rombo country of southern Kenya. Sunrise lay two hours ahead, and I found the leopard blind via a process akin to Braille. The professional hunter, John Fletcher, the tracker, Mmaku, and I felt our way into the small boma of woven tall grass and wild-palm leaves and hunkered on the ground, not speaking or moving. It was 90 minutes later, still night, when we heard the big male feeding in the tree.

I slid the muzzle through an opening in the boma and waited for light. There was the slow dilution of the dark, like cream added to black coffee, until the curled-tail silhouette came into view. Now, I needed to make out the rosettes on the hide, to be sure of where to aim. As they became visible, Fletcher whispered, "Take him."

The leopard dropped from the limb. When we found him, lying in the grass at the base of the tree, Fletcher was smiling, and said, "Well done, lad."

One wonders what might be said today.





### Natural Wonders

Before Cecil became the most universally mourned lion since Disney's Mufasa, trophy hunting had another face. One was that of a Michigander in a Borsalino hat, an archer by the name of Bear. Others were named Hemingway, Ruark, and Roosevelt. These were the recognizable faces of a tradition of ethics and respect toward wild animals and hunting. Now, the public face of trophy hunting has been transfigured, like Jekyll to Hyde, into that of a beaming bowhunting doctor of dentistry from Minnesota.

The Middle French word *trophée*, signifying a "monument to victory," shares an ancient root with another word in French, *trouvé*. *Objet trouvé* means "found object," a natural artifact that has aesthetic value without human modification. In *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*, the late "environmental perceptionist" Paul Shepard defines the found object as "a fragment of the universe." Anything, he tells us, from a unique cowrie shell to a singular raw gem, a feather, tooth, piece of coral, bird's nest, or, I would add, the horns or hide of a hunted animal, "relate[s] man to nature" and functions as "a precursor of art."

Archaeological evidence points to Neanderthal man's fascination with, and collection of, these objects; and later humans painted images of such marvels on the walls of caves. As ancient hunters, though, it was not our artistic sense but pure pragmatism that drew us to the most magnificent wild animals.

### Bigger Is Best

The pursuit of trophy game is a survival strategy dating from the origins of the hunt. Today, the last people on earth to practice the oldest form of trophy hunting are the San hunters of the Kalahari. They run their prey to ground on foot. This is persistence hunting, the first human hunting technique, made possible by the locomotive efficiency of bipedalism, a skin covered in sweat glands for rapid cooling, and opposable thumbs to carry water.

In this hunting marathon, the bulls with the biggest horns are the game of choice. Large headgear means less endurance in the chase; such a male is therefore the one the San cut out of the herd, knowing that he will collapse from exhaustion first, and provide the greatest quantity of meat. It is a fair assumption that this is the template for hunting that we all carry in our DNA: Bigger is best.

Now, of course, it is also symptomatic, for so many, of the depravity of the trophy hunter.



**“**The only regions where wildlife has increased on a large scale in the last century are North America and southern Africa, where conservation is built around hunting.

### Game of Politics

Never mind what late-night hosts and sobbing starlets have to say, or more often tweet, about the death of Cecil. Listen to the words of nominal fellow hunters.

One disconcerting voice is that of a wildlife biologist, former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agent, former member of the California Fish and Game Commission, and current director of a conservation society associated with feathered creatures, who represents himself as an "avid hunter and fisherman," though one, to be sure, who mostly practices "catch-and-release fly-fishing for trout on wild rivers," and who limits his hunts "to game birds like pheasants and quail." Of course he does.

Writing in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the wake of the *scandale d'Cecil*, this professional's considered judgment is, flatly stated, that the "killing of trophy animals sours the

public perception of hunting and helps bring about the demise of outdoor sports in America. It's time to recognize that trophy hunting no longer has a place in true sportsmanship, and put this outdated practice behind us."

These are not the ravings of some PETA-phile but the purportedly honest conclusions of a, by his own lights, fellow sportsman. One might be forgiven for sensing something willowy in such pronouncements, bending correctly to the peak winds of massed opinion, suggesting that Cecil's death could not have come at a better time. They are, nonetheless, ones put forth by an accredited wildlife authority who has influenced wildlife regulation and policy, and may very well do so again.

### Case for the Chase

Before we go gentle into that publicly acceptable vision of hunting (never exceeding the odd brace of grouse, displayed with exquisite good taste in still life or preferably not at all), consider that the case for trophy hunting is extensive and reasoned. Set aside that the instinct to hunt trophy game comes from our unique path of evolution. All one needs is this single fact: The only two regions where wildlife has increased on a large scale in the last



century are North America and southern Africa, where conservation is built around hunting. In southern Africa, regulated hunting is almost exclusively for trophy game, while in North America, many species flourish because of their value as trophies.

The hard truth is that large animals have no worth in most places on earth, except as trophy game. The end of tiger hunting, and ultimately all legal hunting, did nothing to restore the big cat's population in India; instead it has

tumbled. Then there is the poster child for the inefficacy of hunting bans, Kenya, which since it outlawed big-game hunting in 1977 has seen wildlife numbers drop by 60 to 70 percent, with lions plummeting 90 percent.

Antihunters take no issue with this, it being better to let species risk extinction rather than be hunted. Some are pleased to suggest it. Consider Johnny Rodrigues, head of the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force, the body that first brought the Cecil affair to the public's attention: "Our national parks is where the real conservation should be taking place. The animals should be free to roam and tourists come and see them and photograph them. Hunting should be banned altogether.... Animals can take care of themselves." Rodrigues also offers the following: "We have heard that some Americans teach their children to hunt as young as 7 years old. This is a horrifying concept." The horror, the horror.

There is very much a problem, though, with the conceit that national parks are the only places needed to sustain big game. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, hunting areas equal more than 120 percent of national parks lands, amounting to some 540,000 square miles, two Texases. Without trophy hunting, the incentive is to turn these areas over to livestock, while killing any predators drawn out of parks by the prospect of easy meals. By halting virtually all big-game hunting, Botswana has turned every lion outside of a park into a "problem" animal, subject to summary execution; and more lions are indiscriminately killed today than ever were by trophy hunters.

If you would like to view big game only within the confines of national parks and in ever dwindling numbers, by all means lend your support to the prohibition of trophy hunting. Do not be shocked, though, when

"meat" hunting is eventually branded as no better—and it is sheer duplicity to allege that the meat of trophy animals is not consumed.

The answer is not to outlaw trophy hunting, but to make it better. There are remedies suggested, centering on stricter quotas and cracking down on corruption. One, put forth by African wildlife researchers, would ensure that regulations are observed; contributions to antipoaching efforts are made; stocked animals are indigenous and wild captured, as is done today with excess game from national parks; predators are tolerated; local communities gain from paid hunting; and operations comply with national and local laws. It's the concept applied to sustainable rain-forest harvest, fair-trade coffee, and even cage-free eggs, so why not trophy hunting? This is just one idea for making trophy hunting more palatable for the vast majority who are nonhunters.

In the end, though, trophy hunting must be about the doing, not the getting. For traditional trophy hunters, it was about the days in the field and the honor of the take, not the numbers on a score sheet. When it becomes all about acquisition, as with the death of that lion, something has gone terribly wrong.

**YEARS AFTER THAT DAWN** in Kenya, a Zimbabwean PH at a game convention tried to sell me on a leopard hunting technique he'd devised. In Zimbabwe, cat hunting at night with artificial light is legal. So he hung a shop light in a tree above a bait and wired it to a battery and a rheostat. When the leopard was heard feeding on the impala quarter in the darkness, the PH slowly dialed up the light until the cat was illuminated as if it were the break of day, the leopard completely oblivious.

At some point, I stopped listening. I had the only leopard I would ever want. FS

### My Trophy

#### SILVER TREASURE

My first tarpon ate a pinfish swimming under a cork in Key West Harbor. The fishing had been slow, but as we motored in we saw the silver backs of dozens of tarpon rolling in the channel. We anchored up in the current and cast a few baits. For some time we watched the tarpon rolling, amazed by their size and abundance. And then the cork went down—not just taken but yanked below the surface as if

by the hand of a sea demon. I set the hook, and out came the tarpon. First its massive head, mouth agape, then its silver body. And it kept coming. Clear of the water now, the fish gyrated wildly through the air. After that it was a classic tarpon fight—keep it off balance, pump and reel, rod tip to the side. Eventually the guide reached for the leader. I bent over the gunnel and touched the fish

while he revived it. I didn't want this to end. The guide pulled a scale from the fish's flank with his pliers. "Keep this," he said.

Fifteen years later I still have that scale on my desk. I often try to count the rings on it, which tell the fish's age, but usually can't get past 12 or so before I get lost in the memories of that first tarpon. The one you never forget.

—David DiBenedetto



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# FIELD TEST

## TAC DRIVERS

Four precision  
tactical rifles  
that are light  
enough for  
field work

By Jeff Johnston

ROBIN FINLAY (PROP STYLING)



Photograph by ADAM VOORHES

→ Hunting game has nothing to do with war. But the fact remains that the latest "tactical" rifles are the world's most accurate, and they are available to hunters. These guns typically have heavy barrels so they can be fired rapidly with minimum deviation in accuracy; their angular stocks are designed to meld steel to flesh for optimum consistency; light triggers mitigate human error; Picatinny rails facilitate a range of optics and accessories; and detachable magazines make reloading fast. It's everything a soldier needs—and much of what a precision hunter wants, so long as he doesn't mind lugging it, or paying the hefty price. There's no reason not to take an appropriately chambered tac rifle to a beanfield, for example, or to lay siege on a prairie-dog town.



## THE TEST

I put a Burris Veracity 2-10x42mm scope on each rifle, turned the power to 10, and shot from a Lead Sled at 100 yards, outdoors, in a 10-mph crosswind. After each three-shot group, I rotated to the next rifle. I also carried each gun in the field and shot away from the bench to gauge their practical value for hunting. Meanwhile, I evaluated build quality, stock dimensions, fit and finish, trigger pull, special features, and overall performance. —JJ.



[1] BERGARA BCR20 HEAVY TACTICAL

\$5,000;  
[BERGARAUSA.COM](http://BERGARAUSA.COM)

**THE LOWDOWN** The Heavy Tactical weighs 10½ pounds with a folding, multiadjustable Accuracy International AX stock. (A less alien-looking McMillan is optional.) The Bergara action and barrel are meticulously trued, mated, and bedded in Marine-Tex epoxy by former Corps Precision Weapons Section chief instructor Dan Hanus.

**HITS** It produced my best group ever, a .230-inch jagged hole, as well as the best average groups, at .590 inch. The Timney trigger broke crisply at 3 pounds.

**MISSES** Second heaviest, and second priciest, here.

### WHO SHOULD BUY

Tactical guys who want the most accurate rifle regardless of size, and who might use it for hunting in a few specific applications.

[2] PROOF RESEARCH TAC II

\$6,690;  
[PROOFRESEARCH.COM](http://PROOFRESEARCH.COM)

**THE LOWDOWN** The Tac II's barrel is wrapped in carbon fiber, which adds stiffness, dissipates heat, and is much lighter than steel. The company also hand-lays the stock in carbon fiber and Kevlar. Add a Defiance action, a Timney or Jewell trigger, carbon-fiber bedding, and Badger bottom metal, and what you have is a 9-pound tactical rifle that shoots like a 12-pounder. The other test models are great rifles; this is state of the art.

**HITS** You won't find a more accurate rifle (mine averaged .610-inch groups) that's still light enough to carry in the field.

**MISSES** It's expensive.

**WHO SHOULD BUY** Serious tac guys who are also serious hunters—and have an unlimited budget.

[3] RUGER PRECISION RIFLE

\$1,400;  
[RUGER.COM](http://RUGER.COM)

**THE LOWDOWN** The new Precision Rifle is an accurized bolt on a modular, AR-looking frame. Ruger has finally made not just a decent trigger but a superb one. It also reengineered the receiver so that recoil is directed straight into the in-line stock to mitigate felt kick. A threaded-barrel attachment system is fine-tuned for headspace. The rigid buttstock adjusts and folds for packing.

**HITS** The trigger broke crisply at 2.2 pounds. The rifle averaged .660-inch groups. It comes with 10-round Magpul mags, and it's affordable.

**MISSES** In .243, the gun is obese at 11 pounds.

### WHO SHOULD BUY

Tactical nuts on a budget who want the perfect rifle for prairie-dogging.

[4] TIKKA T3 COMPACT TACTICAL

\$949;  
[TIKKA.FI](http://TIKKA.FI)

**THE LOWDOWN** Tikka is known for making high-quality rifles at bargain prices, and its T3 Compact Tactical Rifle is the least expensive here. It's also the lightest, so it's hardly even a fair comparison with the other test models. Yet the gun is admirably accurate and will be familiar in any hunter's hands.

**HITS** Lightweight and very affordable, it's the most versatile hunting rifle tested. It also has the best magazine-release system I've used.

**MISSES** It was the least accurate, averaging .900-inch groups. The trigger is heavy for a tactical rifle at 5 pounds, and it needs an adjustable comb.

**WHO SHOULD BUY** This is the rifle for serious hunters who want to dabble in the tactical world.



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## HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

## JUST WHAT I WANTED!

YOU TRY SO HARD TO GET US THE RIGHT STUFF. AS THANKS, LET US MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU THIS YEAR

We know you love us and only have the best of intentions when you buy us hunting and fishing gear for Christmas. We are often overcome—*stunned* is the word—by your thoughtfulness. (This, incidentally, is why you may not hear “thank you” when we open your gift.)

There is, however, a tragic and built-in rub to buying gear for a sportsman, which is that it’s impossible. Say you’ve learned that your obsessed bass angler favors Gamakatsu extra-wide-gap 4/0 worm hooks with an offset shank. You knock yourself out to get these exact hooks. But when he

opens the gift, you can tell—because of his lopsided smile and his overloud use of the word *wonderful*, which is not a word he has ever used before—that these are not the exact right hooks. Turns out, you bought the Gamakatsu EWG 4/0 worm hooks with offset shanks designed for superline rather than regular line. This may seem like an insanely tiny distinction. But the sad, unjust, and inescapable fact is that these are the kind of tiny details bass nuts notice.

So let us make this easier. Here are some things that we actually want. Hint, hint...



## FABARM L4S INITIAL HUNTER

\$1,250 • [fabarmusa.com](http://fabarmusa.com)

The Italian-made, gas-operated Fabarm L4S Initial Hunter weighs just 6 3/4 pounds in 12 gauge, making it an easy-carrying, hard-hitting, soft-shooting gun. It's good looking and easy to clean, too. After hunting with one this fall, I'd be delighted to see an L4S under my Christmas tree.

—Phil Bourjaily



## FLAMBEAU HEATED HAND MUFF

\$169 • [flambeauoutdoors.com](http://flambeauoutdoors.com)

Warm the hands and the heart of any late-season hunter. Powered by a rechargeable lithium battery, it has three heat settings and runs for up to 10 hours.

—P.B.



## BUSHNELL LEGEND L SERIES BINOCULAR

\$299 • [bushnell.com](http://bushnell.com)

This is the perfect gift for you and me. You don't have to spend a fortune, and I get a solid hunting binocular. The original Bushnell Legend started the modern trend of vastly improved affordable glass. And this updated version (in 10x42 or 8x42) is even better.

—Dave Hurteau



## BRUNTON POWER KNIFE

\$225 • [brunton.com](http://brunton.com)

It looks like a folding knife—but the four “blades” are charging adaptors. The standard USB connects to a power source, and the others fit a variety of devices. —Slaton L. White

## LEGENDARY ARMS THE CLOSER

\$1,600 • [legendaryarmsworks.com](http://legendaryarmsworks.com)

With the Closer, Mark Bansner, who designed and produces High Tech synthetic rifle stocks, has resurrected Ed Brown's excellent Model 704 action and built a near perfect all-around hunting rifle at a very fair price.

—David E. Petzal





### CRKT DEVIATION

**\$70** • [crkt.com](http://crkt.com)

When you already have plenty of classic hunting knives, you want something different—an eye-opener. The Terry Lee Renner-designed Deviation, with its fast-deploy pivot system and a razor-sharp tanto blade, is all that and then some.

—S.L.W.



### CAMP CHEF STRYKER 150

**\$73** • [campchef.com](http://campchef.com)

This camp stove uses 1-pound propane canisters that are available in pretty much every hardware store in the country, as opposed to the hard-to-find mini-butane canisters required for mountaineering stoves. Oh, yeah, and it boils water faster and costs about half as much as most ultralight stoves.

—T. Edward Nickens

### SAVAGE GEAR HARD SHRIMP

**\$11** • [savagegear-usa.com](http://savagegear-usa.com)

Nothing is deadlier in the salt than a killer shrimp imitation—and this one looks flawless. Plus, who doesn't like shrimp at Christmas?

—M.M.



### SHIMANO STRADIC FK

**\$200 and up** • [fish.shimano.com](http://fish.shimano.com)

The latest upgrade to the wildly popular Stradic won Best in Show for freshwater reels at this year's ICAST show. I tested a Stradic on the water, and with a cold-forged drive gear and ideal weight balance, it looks good and performs great.

—Mark Modoski

### CABELA'S BONESNEAKER

**\$90** • [cabelas.com](http://cabelas.com)

Bonesneakers were made for the saltwater flats, but they're also perfect for general wet wading in freshwater. Unlike traditional wading boots that are too big and heavy if you're not wearing them with waders, Bonesneakers are light, fit snugly, and feature Vibram soles thick enough for screw-in studs.

—Joe Cermele



### HATSAN CARNIVORE AIR GUN

**\$799** • [hatsanusa.com](http://hatsanusa.com)

Forget the Red Ryder. I want a serious air gun, and this is it. Available in .30 or .35 caliber, the Carnivore has a two-stage match trigger, shoots up to 890 fps, and can take down medium-size game, with an effective range of 100 yards.

—S.L.W.



### VOORMI HIGH-E HOODIE

**\$229** • [voormi.com](http://voormi.com)

This water-repellent wool hoodie may be the warmest lightweight thing I've ever worn. I may never spend this much on a hoodie, but I'd love it if you did.

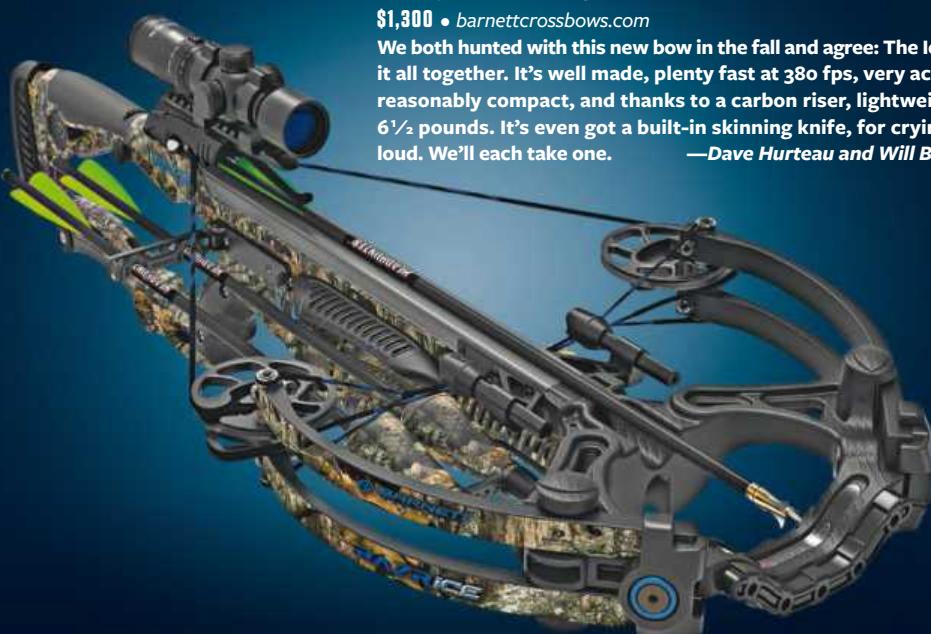


### WETTERLINGS BUSHMAN AXE

**\$169** • [lbean.com](http://lbean.com)

In addition to chopping, this Hudson's Bay-size ax is good at splitting and pounding, unlike otherwise comparable axes. The handle is hickory and the head is hand-forged and ground; you can get it as sharp as a razor.

—D.E.P.

**BARNETT RAZR ICE****\$1,300 • barnettcrossbows.com**

We both hunted with this new bow in the fall and agree: The Ice puts it all together. It's well made, plenty fast at 380 fps, very accurate, reasonably compact, and thanks to a carbon riser, lightweight at 6½ pounds. It's even got a built-in skinning knife, for crying out loud. We'll each take one.

—Dave Hurteau and Will Brantley

**KNEKT DOME****\$300 • knektusa.com**

This funky bubble housing for your GoPro Hero 4 keeps the waterline away from the camera lens, allowing you to nail those half-water-half-sky shots every time.

—J.C.

**FISHPOND DRIFTY BOAT CADDIE****\$100 • fishpondusa.com**

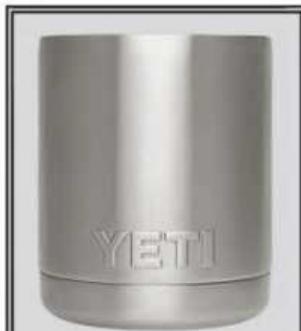
Don't let the name throw you. While it does feature hooks designed to attach to a traditional drift boat's gunwale, the Drift Boat Caddie also has adjustable straps that let you rig the bag on a raft frame, or bolt it permanently to your cooler.

—J.C.

**BROWNING BEAR 4500 DRY BAG****\$100 • browningpacks.com**

Tough, 100 percent waterproof, and with an air-release valve to compress contents to the smallest possible package, this roll-top dry bag doubles as a scentproof duffel for hauling big-game clothing to and from the field.

—T.E.N.

**YETI RAMBLER LOWBALL****\$25 • yeticoolers.com**

What we have here is an overengineered stainless-steel cup. In the morning it keeps coffee hot without burning your fingers; in the evening it keeps your on-the-rocks whiskey cold without the usual sweating of other metal cups. Camp will never be the same.

—S.L.W.

**FENWICK FENGlass FLY ROD AND PFLUEGER MEDALIST REEL****\$200-\$250, rod •****[fenwickfishing.com](http://fenwickfishing.com)****\$120-\$140, reel •****[pfluegerfishing.com](http://pfluegerfishing.com)****Love the buttery feel of your first fiberglass****Fenglass rod? Miss the old Medalist reel you**

fished as a kid? You're not the only one. Both of these classics have been reissued this year and make for a killer fly-rig combo, with the soft bend of glass and the sweet sound of a click-and-pawl drag.

—J.C.

**FISH-SKULL FLY TESTER****\$285 • flymenfishingcompany.com**

Sink a freshly tied streamer or nymph into this tank to make sure it has the right wiggle before adding it into your box.

—J.C.

**CABELA'S X-SOCKS****\$30-\$50 •****[cabelas.com](http://cabelas.com)****Here are socks a guy can get excited about.**

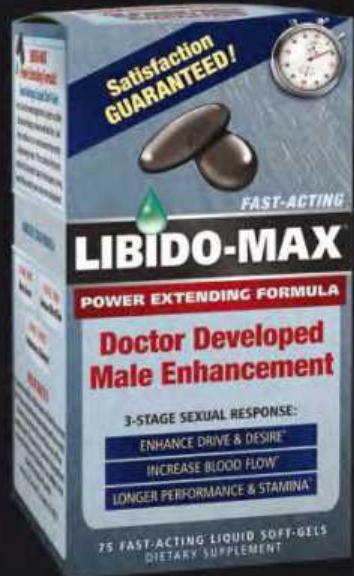
All four styles are made of a merino-wool blend, provide joint and tendon support, and circulate air to keep your feet dry.

I like the Hunting Radiactor Socks (shown).

—C.K.



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CONTINUED FROM P. 63

lucky enough to walk up on a young bull in new snow. But in between I made a few more goat runs.

I went back to Fog Land, but another storm hit. I was better prepared—rain gear, gaiters, a working flashlight—and wandered through the basin, looking. I felt like I'd come to a house where a going-away party had been held earlier in the week. I walked around the base of the stony peak in the fog, rain, and snow. It was beautiful but they were not there. In that fog, I would have to walk up to one face-to-face. I didn't, and in the late day, and on into the night, I hiked out, thinking the thoughts, or non-thoughts, one does on walks like this, hiking out at night, one step in front of the next, your tiny light a thin tunnel through the darkness.

### → A CLEAVER PICTURE

I chose another tack: into the mountains from the Idaho side. I watched the weather, and hit it on the last clear day before a storm. I'd rested up a few days, which felt great. I had energy, going up the trail and, when the trail ended, up the creek. I had that good feeling that you have some days. Maybe you will see an animal, or maybe not, but some days feel different, and on those days, you often see things.

I didn't. But it was great finally to see the country. A deep north-south-running valley, narrowing toward the high peaks to the south. Up into the high country, the wonderful country, where the hard-charging creek constricted to a trickle, and higher still—above the treeline—the wandering green marsh-loops of its snowmelt headwaters. This was where my friend Sean said he had seen goats when he was skiing, on three separate occasions, across the last decade or so. I gained a saddle between peaks—I could not reach the peak in a day—but from that saddle, I was able to look out over what seemed like an infinitude of other glacier-cut high wet basins, and snowcapped-mountain teeth. I could have gone in any direction. I could have spent a month wandering.

Late afternoon always comes quickly in late November. I climbed up onto a ridgeline, to the thin skullcapping of snow, where I saw a track like none I'd ever seen before, fresh and crisp in the day-warm snow. There was a scattering of them—one or two animals—and while some looked deerlike, one did not. It was short and broad—as wide as it was long. I followed the wandering track, around through the rocks, in and out of snow, thinking I would look up and see a goat at any moment: a young goat, or a very

young mule deer. I hoped that the animal had a larger body than its feet suggested.

I followed the tracks until the light grew soft and weak. I kept expecting to look up and see, finally, a goat looking back at me—and I knew, that day, that if I did, I wasn't going to shoot. Still I was intensely curious, and I followed the tracks until they went down out of the snow, and then I followed the ridge down into the darkness, and saw nothing.

My arm hurt worse. There was no time during hunting season to have it looked at. And what would the doctor do anyway—put a cast on it? I was taking care of it, carrying the rifle in my other hand, folding it into the crook of my other arm, up there in that beautiful late-day high country. I gazed out at the magnificent country, the altitude and elevation I had earned, walking all day. *Do goats have similar, or better, vision than humans?* I had no idea. I hoped they could see what I was seeing.

As is so often the case, it was harder to bushwhack down than up. Going up, all routes converge at the top; as long as you keep going uphill, you can't get lost. But going downhill, you can end up almost anywhere. Which I did, after an engagement with thousands of acres of old-growth alder, the trunks and branches clotted together like the most dendritic tangle of brain synapses, the mountain's brain working to keep out intruders. A tangle through which only songbirds might pass, not killers.

### → DEATH GRIP

Darkness, again. I had a flashlight and, this time, a compass, worn on a narrow cord around my neck. I could no longer see the dark valley below and beyond, but tacked my way toward the bottom and the riverside trail that would eventually lead me out. After some hours, the alder disgorged me into a north slope of dense cedar, on a slope which, though not quite vertical, was so steep I had to descend by holding on to the young cedars as if to the railings of stairs.

Down closer to the lowlands, there were giant cedar stumps—and here on this wet shady north slope, the young cedar in which I found myself now tangled was swarming in, growing up around the old stumps like the bars in a jail cell, younger trees growing so close together that even by turning sideways it was hard for me to squeeze between them, and the slope so very steep.

I was gloriously tired. My ankle buckled. I stumbled, and as I fell over a little lip of a cliff—only a 3- or 4-foot drop—the nylon cord on my compass caught on the snag of

one of those cedar stumps, so that I was suddenly noosed, the cord cutting into my neck like a hot saw.

One minute I'd been daydreaming, blundering along, just *existing*, in this strange dark jungle, and the next I was dangling like an outlaw on the gallows, my rifle dropped, my toes unable to find ground beneath me.

My flashlight tumbled several yards downslope where it sent a random beam into the phantasmagoric tangle, each cedar with its boughs spread wide like the outstretched wings of vultures, and it seemed this strange sight would be the last thing I saw.

I did not think about my FedEx driver. I did not think about the knife on my belt. I thought only—flash forwarding 20 years or more—how no one would ever find me, deep in this tangle of off-trail clot: not for a hundred years anyway, not until the young cedars grew huge and the loggers returned. The bars to the cage would spread wider as they grew, and the prison cage of my own whitened bones—my ribs squirrel-chewed, my pelvis porcupine-gnawed, my feet still dangling those useless few inches—would stir like the faintest of wind chimes on the windiest days, when a breath from the outside world was able, thinly, to penetrate these dark woods, this tight grove.

*Do not seek the treasure, I thought...*

I don't know how I broke the nylon that was strong enough to hold my weight. The power of panic, I guess. I snapped it—my eyes seeing stars—and fell down the slope. I lay there panting, joyful. I got up after a while, gathered my things, and hiked out in darkness.

### → LEAVE IN THE COLD

I went back one more time. It was the last week of the season and had been snowing for days. It was also likely the last week I would ever have a goat license. The snow was not too bad, down low, where at times it had been mixed with rain; but as I ascended, it grew deeper, until it was knee-deep, then thigh-deep. I had not brought snowshoes, but I kept going. This was my last chance. I had brought my backpack, complete with tent, cooking equipment, extra dry heavy clothing—the temperature would drop to zero, the windchill much worse—extra gloves, extra everything.

I went up through those same snowy alders, and up the ridge, snow howling against my face, but sweating so much from the labor that each step was like going into the caldera of an active volcano. Did I think that I might encounter a goat? No. Again, I

would have to walk up on one, in this blizzard. But it was the only time I had left, and I have learned that you never encounter good luck staying at home.

I did get lucky.

Late that day, a brief column of sun sank down through the clouds, just as I was cresting a pass, and in that blue sky, that beam of gold sun against new snow, a bald eagle was circling, close enough to me that I could have tossed a tennis ball for it to catch. Then the column of light closed in with clouds and fog and it began to snow again, harder than before, and I pushed on.

I got lucky. Something shifted in my arm, so that the pain was suddenly significant, to the point where it made me sick at my stomach. I got lucky, though, and set up my tent, broken-armed, in dusk, in that blizzard, and crawled inside, where I shivered my shape into an ice cocoon, at the very top of the mountain. I slept solidly, and when I woke up it was still snowing, harder yet, deeper still. I got lucky; turned around and headed down. Fell into a crevasse with my pack, but was able to get out. Continued on, slowly. Crossed an ice bridge down in the low country that second night, and the ice broke, I fell in, but only up to my knees. Continued on, was out before midnight. *Lucky.*

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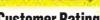
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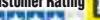
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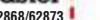
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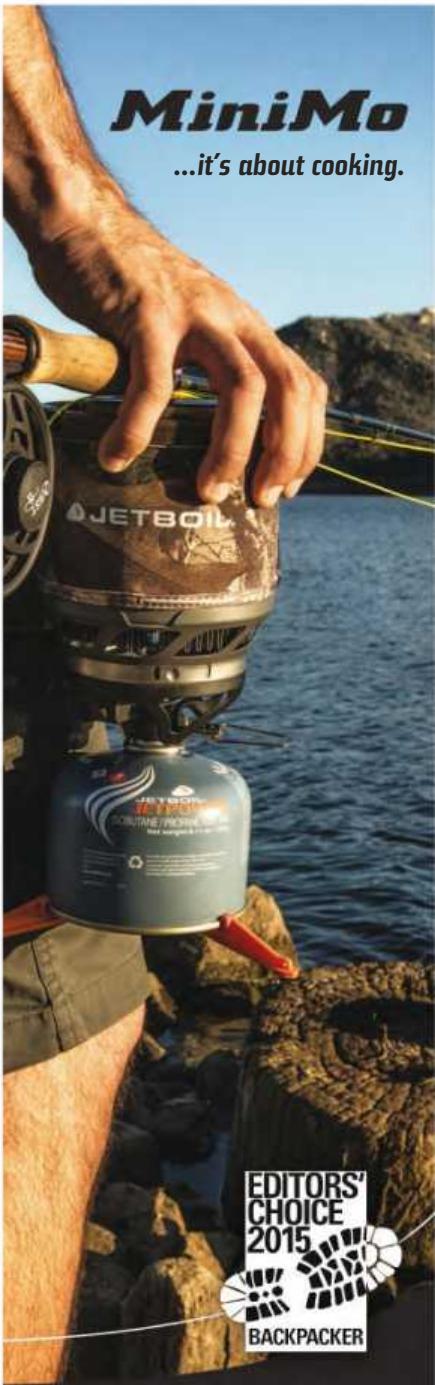
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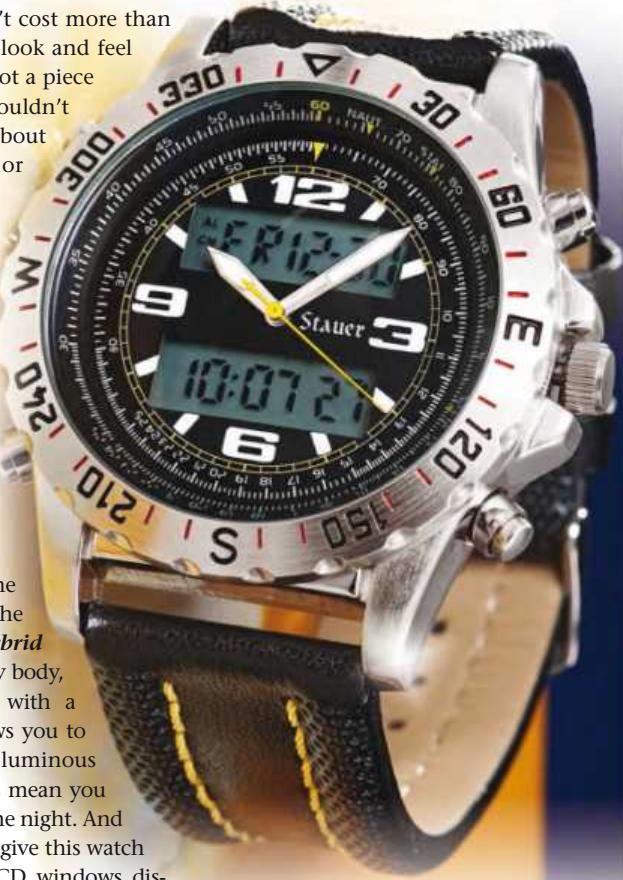
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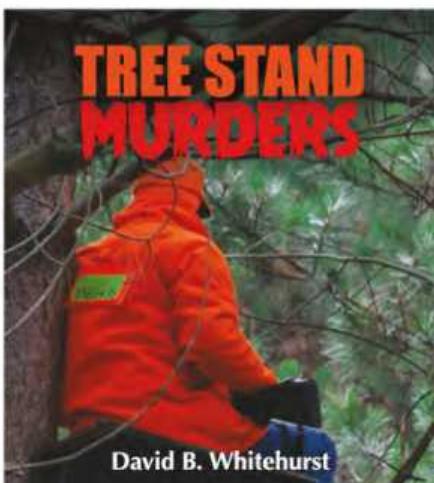
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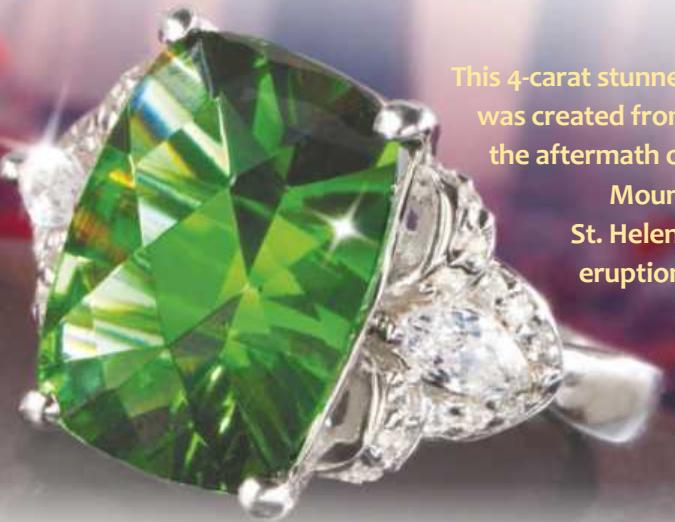
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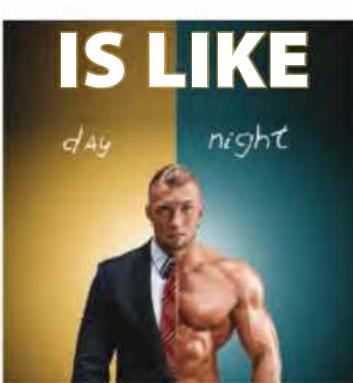
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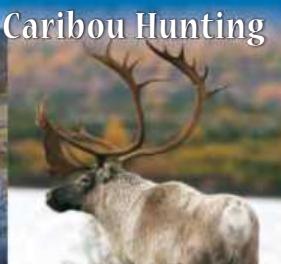
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# SCORE A B&H BUCK

How to size up your deer using my foolproof antler algorithm **By Bill Heavey**

**I** AM BLESSED in having a mate who understands I basically lose my mind from mid October until the first of the year. During this time, for example, the importance of access to clean, odor-free hunting clothes falls somewhere between being a birthright and a matter of national security. Meanwhile, if the inside of our house resembles a foster home for unwed warthogs, I'm fine with that. Occasionally, in an effort to more fully misunderstand each other, Michelle and I will talk about the pull that whitetail deer hunting has on the male psyche. Below are excerpts from some of these conversations.

**Michelle:** Why is it men want to attach a number to deer antlers? And why do they then think that this number matters?

**Bill:** I'm happy to be able to respond to your question. And the answer is that I have no idea. Were I a better person, I would admit this, to both you and my friends.

**M:** So why don't you?

**B:** Well, I just told you. As for my friends, it's like this: For a guy, uttering the words "I don't know"—whether he is lost, has no idea why a Cover 2 defense in football is risky on third-and-short situations, or is estimating the number of gumballs in the big jar down at the local tavern—is not an option. It's the equivalent of saying, "I've never told anybody this before, but I like to wear flirty dresses and have people address me as 'Beth.'"

**M:** We were talking about why it's ridiculous to score antlers.

**B:** Right. It may be because men are genetically predisposed to be ridiculously competitive. We are proud of being the best at things that no one should be proud of: who can put his whole fist in his mouth, who can fart the loudest, who has the longest—

**M:** Hold it right there, cowboy. So how are antlers scored?

**B:** There are a number of straightforward and utterly incomprehensible formulas, and they're all stupid. For bucks killed with a firearm, for example, it's this one:

$$K = \frac{x'y'' - y'x''}{(x'^2 + y'^2)^{3/2}}$$

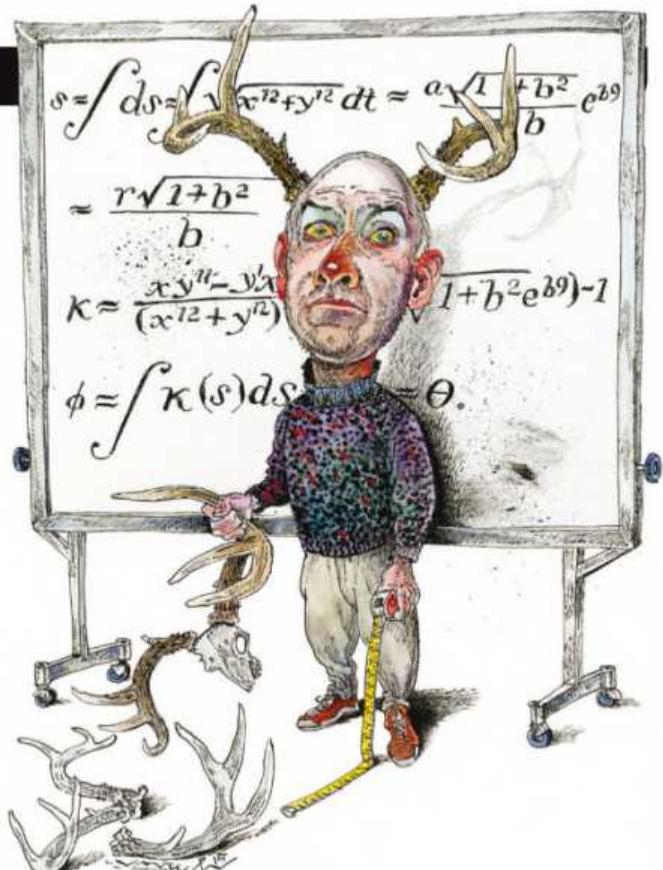
K, of course, is the antler score. X is the gun caliber. Y is the biggest deer you imagined you might see that day. The quotation marks are how high off the ground your stand was. Moving on, the  $3/2$  on the bottom represents the actual size of the antlers plus the additional 50 percent known as the "exaggeration factor."

**M:** I hear you talking about these other scoring systems. I forget the names. Boone and Sprocket? Hope and Lung?

**B:** It's Boone and Crockett. That's an elite group that only scores deer that were killed by hunters dressed in coonskin hats and muslin shirts. Pope and Young is the other one. I think they only accept bucks taken by Catholics.

**M:** Are those systems stupid, too?

**B:** Oh, majorly. They're nuts about both sides of a rack matching. If they were judging trees, for example, the average white pine would beat the biggest oak. Say you kill some mack daddy buck with 300 inches of bone on his head. That rack might miss the books just because the sides looked different. Conversely, an otherwise inferior rack could make the record books. In 2009, for example, an 80-pound three-legged buck was killed near Three Mile Island. Its left antler looked like a head of cauliflower that



nevertheless scored 115. Instead of a right antler, embedded in its skull was a side mirror from a 2007 Kia Sedona—you know, the objects-are-closer-than-they-appear kind? Using these systems, the scorers concluded that the two sides matched perfectly and awarded the rack a score of 264<sup>5%</sup>.

**M:** Why do so few people know about this?

**B:** Because I made it up.

**M:** That's so funny! It's totally baffling that Emma doesn't introduce you to more of her friends. Anyway, let's keep going. What's the difference between "typical" and "nontypical" antlers?

**B:** Those refer to the way the deer is taken. If you're in your stand and a deer walks by and you shoot it, that's a typical rack. A nontypical is where a guy accidentally shoots through the wall of the ground blind, hits his buddy's tire, and—because he didn't set the parking brake—the truck rolls downhill into a stream just as a buck is crossing and kills it. You have to be very skillful to pull that off.

**M:** Wow. I'm learning so much. What's a main beam?

**B:** Like cars, deer eyes come factory-equipped with high beams, low beams, and parking lights, which are only used when bedding. Some newer deer have fog lights. The main beams are predominantly used in low light, which is when most deer are killed. So that's what is measured. Converting lumens to length is complicated, though. After great debate, a lumen was determined to be the equivalent of 1½ inches.

**M:** Who determined this?

**B:** Me and some other guys.

**M:** You are always slinging around terms like *green score*, *drying period*, and *gross score*. What are these?

**B:** The green score is the initial measurement. It's almost always 10 to 15 inches less than the "true" score, which is left to the hunter's discretion. The drying period is the 60 days after the green score is taken. During this time, hunters tug on the antlers to make them longer. Some use tongs; traditionalists prefer their hands. It never works, but it is customary.

**M:** That's not really a reason to do it.

**B:** My god, you're right! That never occurred to me. Anyway, gross score is a measure of your mate's revulsion upon hearing that you intend to have a full-body mount placed above the bed. There is usually a spike in divorce activity around the time the gross score is delivered.



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